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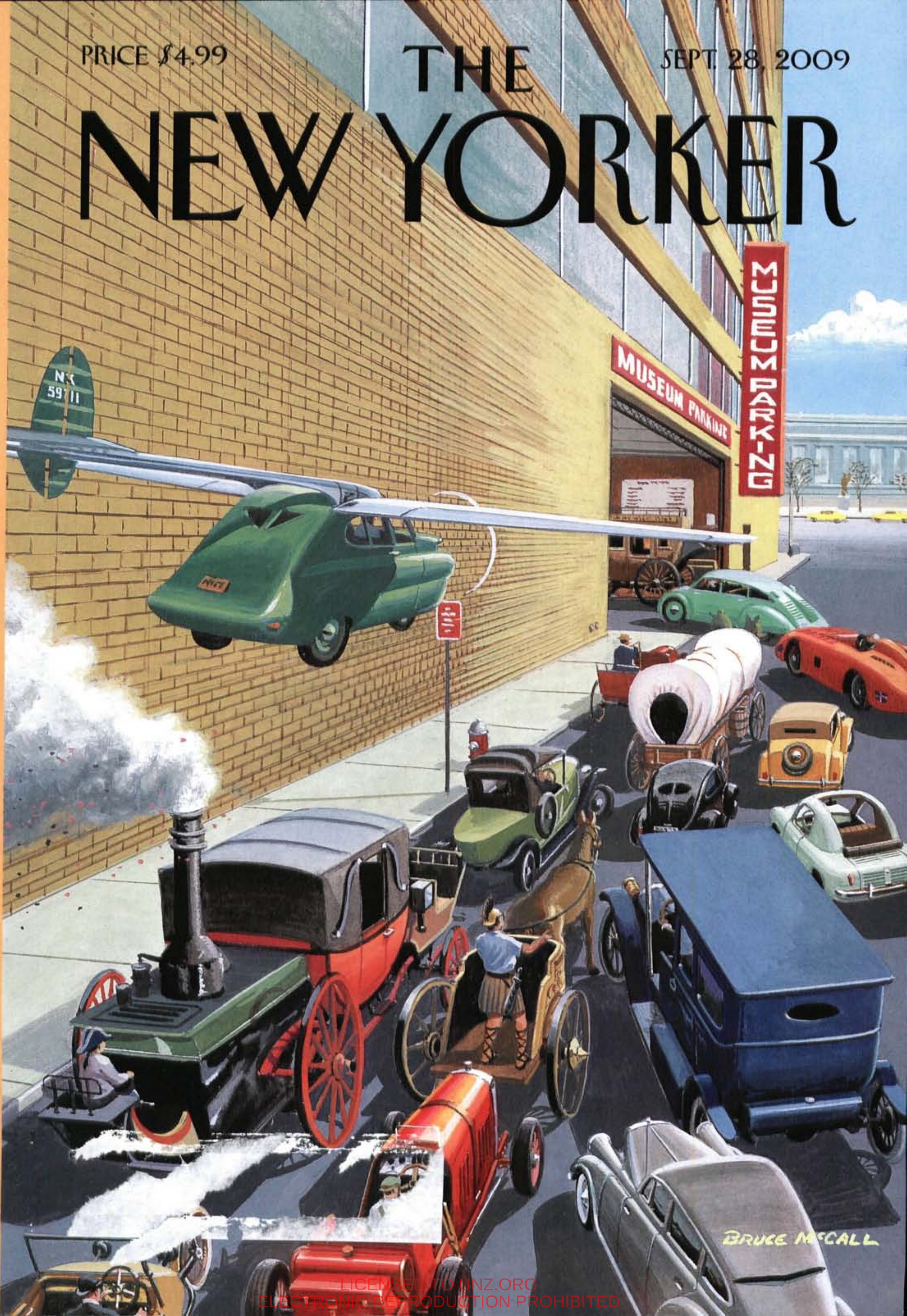
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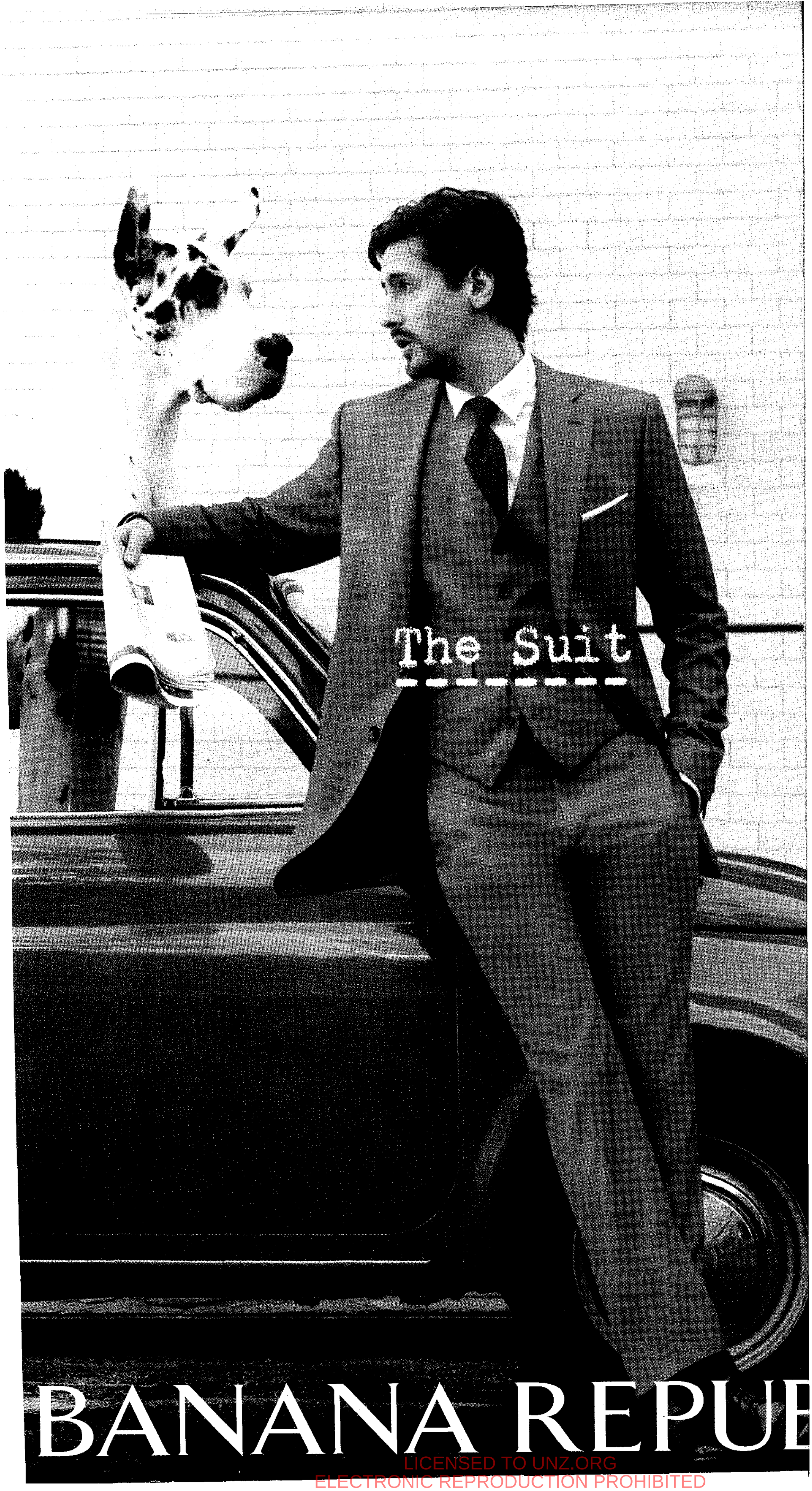
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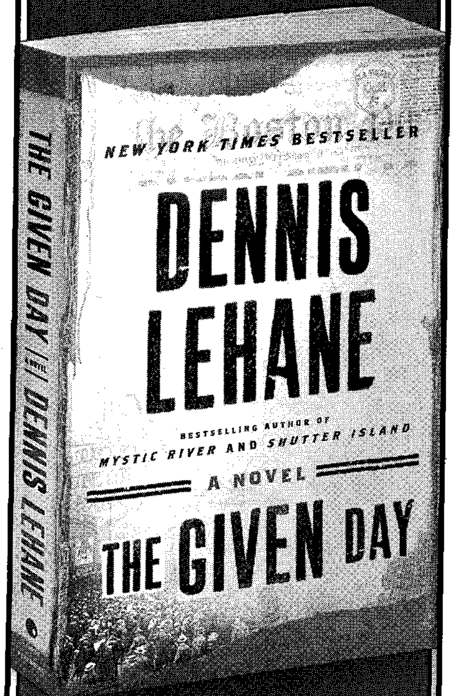
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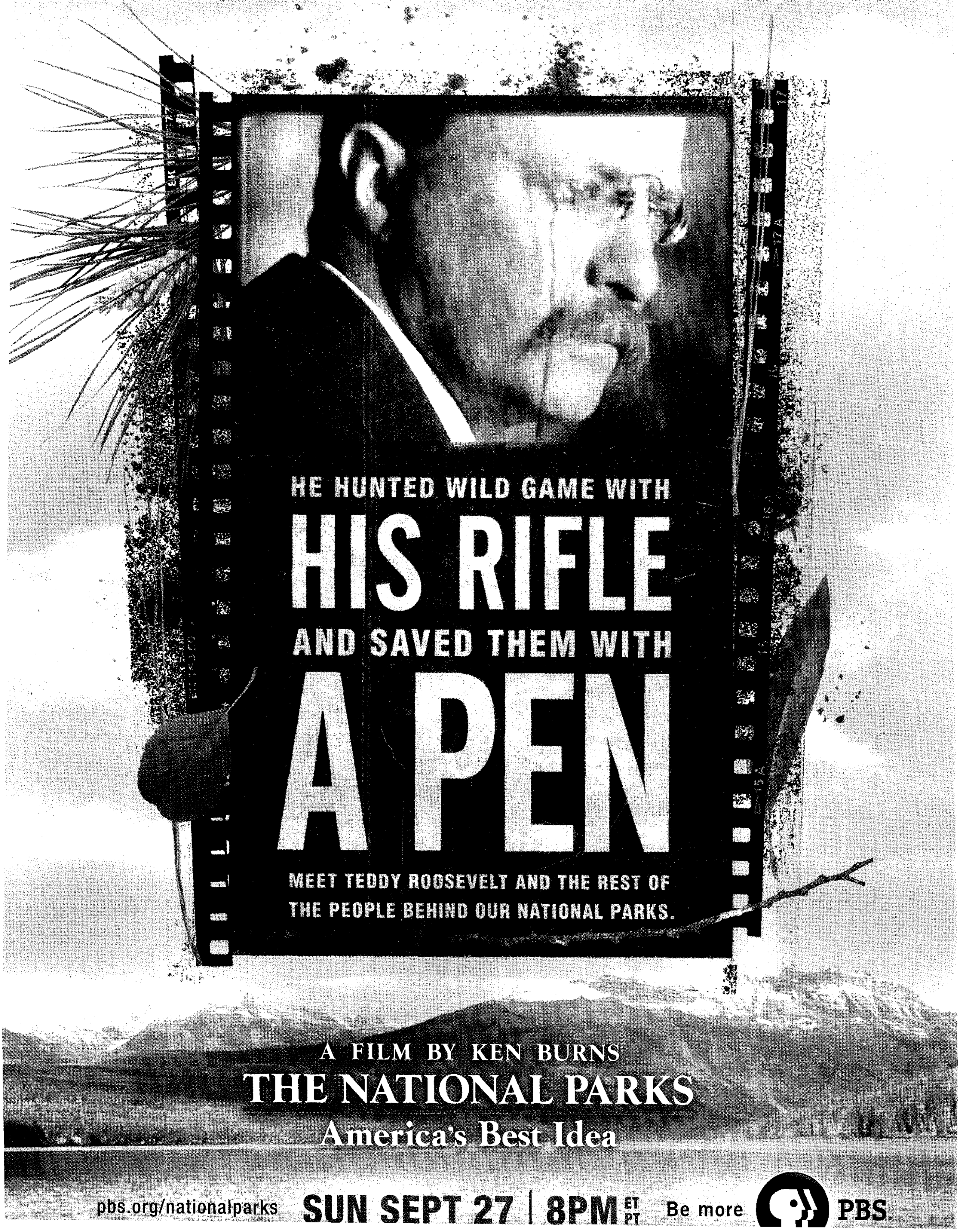

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Tomorrow Never Comes:
Why We Procrastinate and
How It Matters

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CONTRIBUTORS

Peter J. Boyer ("Getting to No," p. 32) joined the magazine as a staff writer in 1992.

Adam Gopnik (Comment, p. 21; Books, p. 72) has published several books, including "Paris to the Moon," "Through the Children's Gate," and, most recently, "Angels and Ages: A Short Book About Darwin, Lincoln, and Modern Life."

Susan Orlean ("The It Bird," p. 26), the author of "Lazy Little Loafers," is working on a book about Rin Tin Tin.

Michael Schulman (The Talk of the Town, p. 23) is a member of the magazine's editorial staff.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 25) writes a regular column on economics, business, and finance. He is the author of "The Wisdom of Crowds," which is available in paperback.

David Mason (Poem, p. 29) is the author of four books of poems, including "Arrivals" and "Ludlow," and has a memoir, "News from the Village," coming out next year.

Bruce McCall (Cover) has been a *New Yorker* contributor since 1979. His most recent book is "Marveltown."

George Packer ("The Last Mission," p. 38), a staff writer, is currently a fellow at the American Academy in Berlin. His new book, "Interesting Times: Writings from a Turbulent Decade," will be published in November.

Wendell Berry (Poem, p. 46) has written numerous books of poetry, fiction, and essays. "Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food" has just been published, and "Leavings: Poems" is due out in November.

Michael Specter ("A Life of Its Own," p. 56) is a staff writer. His new book, "Denialism: How Irrational Thinking Hinders Scientific Progress, Harms the Planet, and Threatens Our Lives," comes out at the end of October.

Joost Swarte (Illustration, p. 57), a regular contributor, received the Award of Excellence 2008 from *Communication Arts* for his cover for the August 20, 2007, issue of the magazine.

Marisa Silver (Fiction, p. 66), the author of two novels, "No Direction Home" and "The God of War," and a story collection, "Babe in Paradise," has a new collection coming out next year.

Nancy Franklin (On Television, p. 84) is the magazine's television critic.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
A live chat with *Susan Orlean* on Thursday, September 24th, plus a video of her chickens. / More video: A new *Jorge Colombo* Finger Painting; *Richard Brody's* DVD of the Week. / Audio: *Adam Gopnik* on the Dreyfus affair; *Marisa Silver* reads a Peter Taylor story; the Political Scene podcast, hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden*. / Slide show: *Peter Schjeldahl* on Kandinsky. / Blogs: *Hendrik Hertzberg* and *George Packer* on politics, *James Surowiecki* on the economy, *Evan Osnos* on China, *Macy Halford* on books, and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

THE MAIL

IN DETENTION

After reading Steven Brill's article on the debate over measuring teacher performance, it's not surprising that large urban public schools are such failures ("The Rubber Room," August 31st). Administrators of New York City public schools, including Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Joel Klein, the city's schools chancellor, are seemingly battling incompetence with incompetence. Instead of proactively addressing the problem of bad teachers, they are using passive-aggressive tactics to force resignations, and spending taxpayer dollars as they do so. Good leadership is essential to any successful organization, and nothing will change until there is a clear vision that promotes and inspires coöperation at all levels, starting with administration.

Ann Karasinski
Belmont, Mich.

Brill captures the Kafkaesque quality of Rubber Rooms, in which teachers linger while the Department of Education ponders accusations against them. The United Federation of Teachers has urged the hiring of investigators and arbitrators dedicated to the process, in order to speed it up; Chancellor Klein has sharply increased his legal staff, but, despite his strong language about Rubber Rooms, he has not actually made them a priority. While Chancellor Klein and his supporters prefer to blame the teachers' contract for their own administrative inefficiencies, the fact is that these problems can be solved, while retaining due process for teachers. No one—teachers least of all—wants incompetents in the classroom. But neither does any teacher want to find him- or herself in the position of Kafka's Joseph K., arrested "without having done anything wrong" and subjected to official persecution, anonymous charges, and offenses that are never specified.

Michael Mulgrew
President
United Federation of Teachers
New York City

I was disappointed by the absence of any discussion of teacher retention in Brill's article. I began working in the New York City system as a teaching fellow seven years ago and have seen almost all of those who started teaching at the same time I did leave the profession. In fact, data from the D.O.E. shows a little over half of new teachers stay with the job for more than five years. More than a third do not make it through the third year, when they would be eligible for tenure. Klein and Dan Weisberg claim that labor-force flexibility is what they need to insure that there are quality teachers in city classrooms. But allowing teachers with little experience to learn on the job is not the way to build a high-quality workforce. Rather, smaller class sizes, improved mentoring, and increased union protections for new teachers will help solve the city's real education crisis: the droves of bright young teachers leaving our profession every year.

Peter Lamphere
Bronx, N.Y.

NEW READINGS

The depiction of my book, "The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism," in a discussion of Judas by Joan Acocella is misleading (A Critic at Large, August 3rd). "The Curse of Cain" does not recommend jettisoning monotheism. Instead, it explores two sides of monotheism: one that tends toward exclusion and violence and the other toward multiplicity—"the plenitude of monotheism"—and community. It argues that monotheism has harbored both possibilities, and, instead of advocating rewriting the Bible naïvely, it recommends, and engages in, reinterpreting it.

Regina Schwartz
Professor of English and Law
Northwestern University
Evanston, Ill.

•

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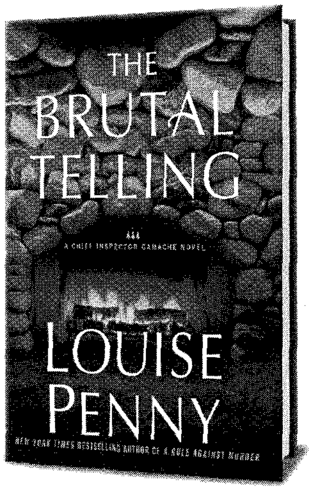
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**BOOKLIST*
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
LEIA’S LEGEND

Carrie Fisher has already revealed a lifetime of funny anecdotes in last year’s memoir, “Wishful Drinking.” Her one-woman show of the same title covers the same material, but it has the advantage of being performed by Fisher herself. At Studio 54, Fisher talks about electroshock therapy; her iconic mother, Debbie Reynolds; and surviving Hollywood after becoming the intergalactic princess of every boy’s dreams. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
OH, YEAH

The thrilling local trio the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, who shook up their sound on their third and most recent album, “It’s Blitz!,” by swapping barbed guitar riffs for sparkling electronic beats, perform two hometown shows, at the Music Hall of Williamsburg and Radio City. (See page 9.)

DANCE
VARIETY SHOW

This week, City Center’s democratic “Fall for Dance” festival offers performances by Ohad Naharin’s Batsheva Dance Company, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Savion Glover, Martha Graham Dance Company, Morphoses/The Wheeldon Company, Monica Bill Barnes & Company, the puppeteer Basil Twist, and Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo. (See page 13.)

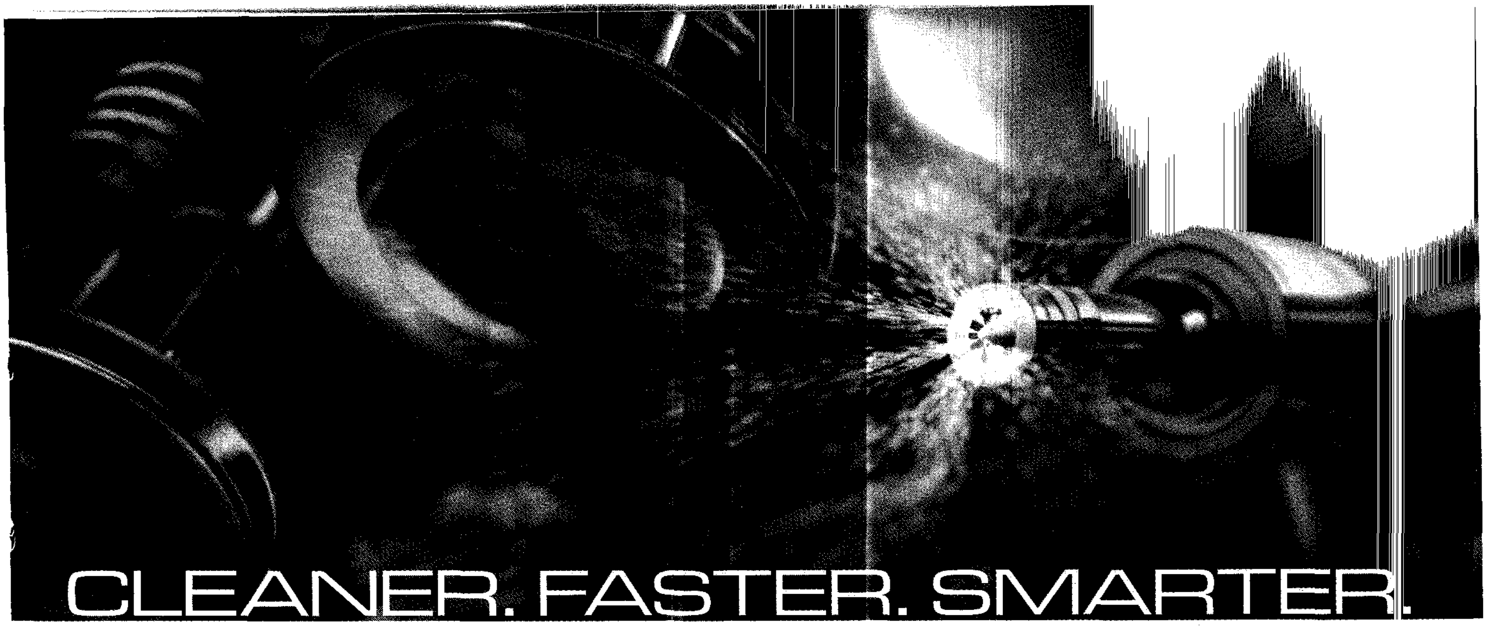
CLASSICAL MUSIC
BENNY’S BEAT

The clarinettist Benny Goodman left his papers to the Yale School of Music; this week the clarinettists David Shifrin and Romie de Guise Langlois perform in a concert that features Bartók’s “Contrasts” and Copland’s Clarinet Concerto, both of which Goodman commissioned. (See page 15.)

MOVIES
SEEING RED

The New York Film Festival features an unusual sidebar at the Walter Reade Theatre. “(Re)Inventing China” presents movies made in the People’s Republic between 1949 and 1966, including “Platoon Commander Guan” and “Two Stage Sisters.” (See page 17.)

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, at Dia at the Hispanic Society. Photograph by Gus Powell.



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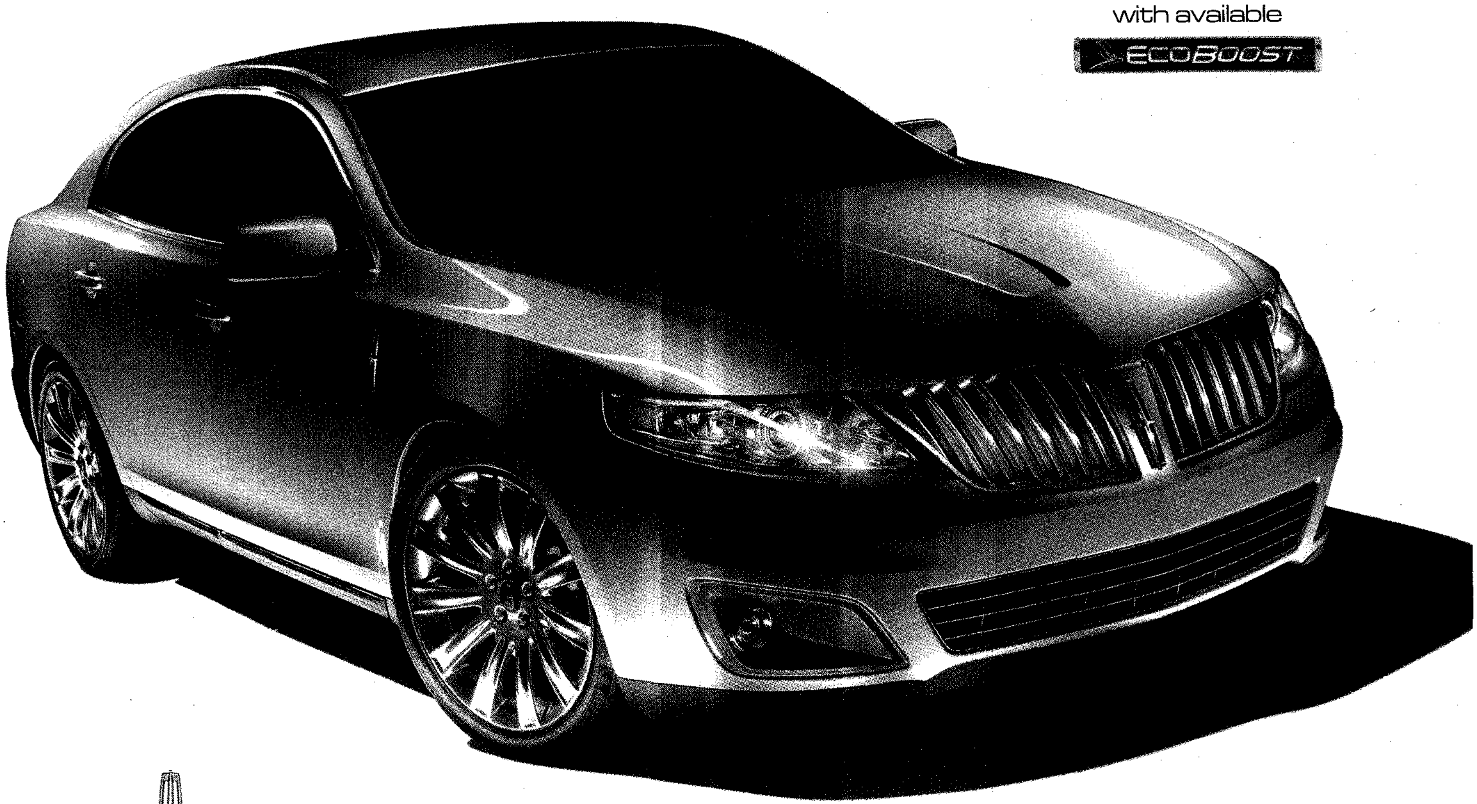

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AFTER MISS JULIE
Sienna Miller stars in Patrick Marber's adaptation of Strindberg's play from 1888, about an upper-class girl who preys on a servant at her father's country estate. Marin Ireland and Jonny Lee Miller also star; Mark Brokaw directs. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

A BOY AND HIS SOUL
At the Vineyard, Colman Domingo wrote and performs this play set to soul music, about a young black man in Philadelphia in the eighties. Tony Kelly directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 24. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

BROKE-OLOGY
In Nathan Louis Jackson's new play, a young man returns from college in Connecticut to his Kansas home, where his brother still lives, to care for his sick father. Thomas Kail directs the Lincoln Center Theatre production. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

BYE BYE BIRDIE
John Stamos, Gina Gershon, Nolan Gerard Funk, Jayne Houdyshell, and Bill Irwin star in the 1960 musical, directed and choreographed by Robert Longbottom, about a fifties-era teen idol. With a book by Michael Stewart, lyrics by Lee Adams, and music by Charles Strouse. The Roundabout production opens the new Henry Miller's Theatre. In previews. (124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

CAMBRIA/DOUGLASS
The Irish Arts Center and Classical Theatre of Harlem present two pieces exploring the life and work of the ex-slave and author Frederick Douglass: Donal O'Kelly's "The Cambria," about Douglass's escape to Ireland, runs in repertory with "Frederick Douglass Now," written and performed by Roger Guenveur Smith. Opens Sept. 23. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 212-868-4444.)

CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION
Sam Gold directs a new comedy by Annie Baker, about the dynamics among five people in a community drama class in New England. Previews begin Sept. 24. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

COUNTY OF KINGS
Lemon Andersen wrote and performs a one-man show, about his coming-of-age in Brooklyn during the birth of hip-hop. Previews begin Sept. 29. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

HAMLET
Jude Law stars in the Donmar Warehouse production that originated in London's West End. Michael Grandage directs. In previews. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

IMELDA, A NEW MUSICAL
Pan Asian Repertory Theatre presents a new musical, with a book by Sachi Oyama, music by Nathan Wang, and lyrics by Aaron Coleman, about Imelda Marcos and her influence over the Philippines and its place in world politics. Tim Dang directs. In previews. (Julia Miles Theatre, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

KILLERS AND OTHER FAMILY
Lucy Thurber wrote this drama, about a young Manhattan woman trying to avoid her dark small-town past. Caitriona McLaughlin directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 24. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

LET ME DOWN EASY
In her one-woman show, Anna Deavere Smith channels subjects she interviewed about the resilience of the human body. Directed by Leonard Foglia. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE
Nora Ephron and Delia Ephron wrote this collection of vignettes, based on the book by Ilene Beckerman, performed by a rotating cast that includes Samantha Bee, Kristin Chenoweth, Tyne Daly, Katie Finneran, Rosie O'Donnell, Mary Louise Wilson, Rhea Pearlman, and Rita Wilson. Karen Carpenter directs. In previews. (Westside Theatre, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

MAHIDA'S EXTRA KEY TO HEAVEN
A play by Russell Davis, about an American who becomes involved with an Iranian college student in the Pacific Northwest. Michele Pawk, Roxanna Hope, Arian Moayed, and James Wallert star; Will Pomerantz directs the Epic Theatre Ensemble production. In previews. Opens Sept. 26. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101.)

MEMPHIS
Joe DiPietro wrote the book and lyrics and David Bryan wrote the music and lyrics for this new musical, about the birth of rock and roll in the fifties. Christopher Ashley directs. In previews. (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

NEW YORK MUSICAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
The annual festival, which has produced such hits as "Next to Normal" and "Title of Show," begins its fifth season. Opens Sept. 28. (Various locations. 212-352-3101.)

THE NIGHT WATCHER
Primary Stages presents a monologue written and performed by Charlayne Woodard, about her experience as a woman unable to bear children. Daniel Sullivan directs. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

OLEANNA
Bill Pullman and Julia Stiles star in David Mamet's drama, about a power struggle between a male professor and a female student. Doug Hughes directs. Previews begin Sept. 29. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

OTHELLO
John Ortiz and Philip Seymour Hoffman star in the Shakespeare tragedy, directed by Peter Sellars, in a Public Theatre/LAByrinth production. In previews. Opens Sept. 27. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-967-7555.)

THE ROYAL FAMILY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents the 1927 comedy by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, about the idiosyncrasies of a family of stage actors. The cast includes Ana Gasteyer, Larry Pine, Tony Roberts, John Glover, Rosemary Harris, Jan Maxwell, and Reg Rogers. Doug Hughes directs. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

A STEADY RAIN
Hugh Jackman and Daniel Craig star in a new drama by Keith Huff, about a pair of Chicago cops whose friendship is tested on the job. John Crowley directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 29. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

STILL LIFE
Will Frears directs Alexander Dinelaris's play, about a photographer whose sudden avoidance of her craft and subsequent despair are disrupted by an unlikely romance. An MCC Theatre production, starring Dominic Chianese, Adriane Lenox, Sarah Paulson, Halley Feiffer, and Frederick Weller. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SUPERIOR DONUTS
Michael McKean stars in the latest play by Tracy Letts, about a white ex-hippie who owns a run-down doughnut shop in a changing Chicago neighborhood, and employs a black teen-ager who tries to improve the place. Tina Landau directs. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TWO UNRELATED PLAYS BY DAVID MAMET
At Atlantic Theatre Company, Neil Pepe directs "Keep Your Pantheon" and "School." In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

VIGIL
Morris Panych wrote this dark comedy, about a lowly bank worker tending to his wealthy elderly aunt. Stephen Dimenna directs. In previews. (DR2, 103 E. 15 St. 212-239-6200.)

WISHFUL DRINKING
Carrie Fisher performs her solo autobiographical show, about her drinking, addiction, and depression in Hollywood. Tony Taccone directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

NOW PLAYING

AFTERMATH
Plays about Iraq are no longer the fashion (the theatre, like the country, is distractible), so the arrival of a sturdy, heartfelt one is grimly welcome. Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen ("The Exonerated") travelled to Jordan in June, 2008, to interview dozens of Iraqi refugees. Eight of them are represented here, mostly verbatim, including an imam, who was taken to Abu Ghraib for reasons that still baffle him, and a theatre director, who says that Iraq reminds him of "King Lear" ("because of all the betrayals"). The portraits are warm and disarming, inflected with humor as well as horror. Ultimately, the piece is too credulous to offer an original outlook, but the bleakly familiar picture it creates is worth the repeat viewing. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

BLIND LEMON BLUES
If anyone's music could get a game audience going, it would be that of two bluesmen from Texas in the nineteen-twenties: Huddie (Lead Belly) Ledbetter and his main influence, Lemon (Blind Lemon) Jefferson. But this cramped production, in which Lead Belly (Cavin Yarbrough), near the end of his life, looks back on the days when he and Blind Lemon travelled the country playing music, practically puts the audience to sleep with a seemingly endless string of blues numbers performed Broadway-style, without a bit of authentic soul. The co-writer, director, and choreographer, Akin Babatunde, would have been wise to hire a bona-fide blues musician to play the role of Blind Lemon, rather than casting himself in the role. (Theatre at St. Peter's, 54th St. at Lexington Ave. 212-935-5820.)

THE CONFIDENCE MAN
Woodshed Collective performs a play by Paul Cohen, based on Herman Melville's 1857 novel, about a riverboat con artist, staged aboard the decommissioned U.S. Coast Guard ship Lilac, which is docked in the Hudson River. (North side of Pier 40, West St. at Houston St. Tickets, which are free, may be reserved at www.brownpapertickets.com. Through Sept. 26.)

IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?
In Lennox Robinson's sly and amusing 1933 play, first performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, a travelling troupe sets up shop in the seaside village of Inish and starts feeding the locals a steady diet of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov. Pretty soon, the sunny summer has turned rainy and oppressive, young couples are making suicide pacts, and misunderstood souls are jumping off piers. Director Jonathan Bank and a fine company of actors play it thoroughly straight, infusing the satire with tenderness. The comedy loses a little steam at the start of the second act, as it self-consciously explains the central joke, but gathers itself for a rousing Irish reel of a finale, while endorsing the revolutionary power of theatre. Some in the audience may take a secret pleasure in Robinson's gentle puncturing of the icons of early-twentieth-century drama. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

THE PROVENANCE OF BEAUTY
The Foundry Theatre's work is hard to categorize, particularly its latest, a poetic "travelogue" in which audience members take a guided bus tour around the South Bronx. Through headphones, we hear live and recorded commentary touching on consciousness, race, traffic, and (a bit piously) the paradoxes of gentrification: witness the neighborhood aspirationally named "SoBro," or the sunny park that has sprouted next to a wastewater-treatment plant. The perception-changing piece, created by Melanie Joseph and Claudia Rankine, dares us to find the slums and correctional centers beautiful, even as it turns socioeconomic difference into an uneasy spectator sport. Take a good look now, it tells us, because the borough is as ephemeral as theatre itself. (The bus leaves from the Elmendorf Reformed Church, at 171 E. 121st St., between Lexington and Third Aves. For reservations, which are required, call 866-811-4111.)

THE RETRIBUTIONISTS
Playwrights Horizons begins its season with a new thriller by Daniel Goldfarb, directed by Leigh Silverman. (Reviewed in this issue.) (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Sept. 27.)

Also Playing

THE BEREAVED: The Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101. Through Sept. 26. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **THE PIED PIPERS OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE:** Theatre 80 St. Marks, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-352-3101. **THE PRIDE OF PARNELL STREET:** 59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TOXIC AVENGER:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

THE BELL HOUSE
149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—Sept. 29: The Japanese instrumental band **Mono** comes to town to showcase a superb new album, "Hymn to the Immortal Wind." Since it formed a decade ago, in Tokyo, this quartet has developed its songs into complex forms that encompass both epic noise-rock blowouts and delicate, hushed passages, often driven by spare glockenspiel melodies. While Mono's latest album is full of orchestral ear candy thanks to an enormous string section, the live version of the band, propelled by the interplay between the guitarists, Takaakira (Taka) Goto and Yoda, is powerful enough to impress. With **Maserati**, a sleek post-rock group from Athens, Georgia.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Sept. 23: The **Baseball Project** is the brainchild of the guitarist Steve Wynn and the bassist Scott McCaughey, rock lifers and inveterate fans of the national pastime. Together, they wrote a bunch of songs exploring the greatness and the grime of the game they love. Enlisting the aid of the drummer Linda Pitmon (from Golden Smog) and the guitarist Peter Buck (of R.E.M.), they recorded "Volume One: Frozen Ropes and Dying Quails," one of the best albums from the summer of 2008. Now they're on tour with one of McCaughey's other groups, the **Minus 5**, and with the **Steve Wynn IV**. Incidentally, you don't have to know a thing about the sport to dig the Baseball Project; you just have to know a terrific rock song when you hear it. Sept. 24: For their new CD, "Get Color," the Los Angeles-based noisy art rockers **HEALTH** have done more than just rein in their sound, which is now an atmospheric wall of pounding dance music. They are including prize tickets in select copies of the release. Items ranging from a round-trip ticket to California to a bag of cat hair will be awarded. Among the openers for this show are **Tanlines**, a local duo who lovingly craft balmy, synth-based dance tracks. Sept. 28: **Mono** and **Maserati** (see the Bell House).

BROOKLYN BOWL
61 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg (718-963-3369)—Sept. 26: The twin brothers Darin and Greg Bresnitz (who operate as Finger on the Pulse) recently took a break from throwing heaving dance parties to renovate their Williamsburg studio apartment and shoot "Dinner with the Band," a cooking-and-music show they produce that's slated to première on IFC later this year. Now that the luxurious kitchen studio is finished, they're ready to party at this freshly christened (and one-hundred-per-cent wind-powered) bowling alley. The French disco-edit prodigy **Pilooski** is flying in for the occasion.

BRUAR FALLS
245 Grand St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (347-529-6610)—Sept. 26: **Bear Hands** are a Brooklyn four-piece who have recently hunkered down in the studio, agonizing over pedals and tambourines, creating percussive, folk-infused alt-rock. The new material's nuanced production may suggest that the band has a big agenda, but the group tempers its ambitions with a decidedly home-made vibe. There's no mistaking their garage-rock origins.

CAKE SHOP
152 Ludlow St. (212-253-0036)—Sept. 26-27: **Carlapalooza 2009:** After Carla Menera was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, musical friends gathered to show their support and Carlapalooza was born. Now in its fourth year, this eclectic D.I.Y. festival of up-and-coming punk-rock bands is a benefit for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Both shows are all-day events; **Psyched to Die** and **Dead Mechanical** headline the first day, and **MC Chris** presides over the second. (For a complete schedule and donation information, visit myspace.com/carlapalooza.)

GIANTS STADIUM
The Meadowlands, East Rutherford, N.J. (800-745-3000)—Sept. 23-24: Though some may say that **U2's** best days are behind them, the biggest band in the world isn't listening. "No Line on the Horizon," their twelfth studio opus, came out earlier this year, and it's rumored that they're working on yet another album. After all their years on the road, U2 are consummate showmen. Their current outing, the "360° Tour," gives Bono and the boys a hulking stage set in the center of the crowd on which to perform their sweeping anthems.

JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH
55 Washington Sq. S. (800-595-4849)—Sept. 24: The **Orchestra of Tetouan**, from the Moroccan port city that's adjacent to the Strait of Gibraltar and only a few miles from Spain, plays Andalusian classical music.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—Sept. 25: The Austin-based singer-songwriter **James McMurtry** released his first album, "Too Long in the Wasteland," in 1989, and quickly established himself as a musical storyteller of the first order. The son of Larry McMurtry, he comes by his narrative chops honestly, though he owes just as much to Warren Zevon. He knows how to make the most of simple, punchy rock-and-roll chords and riffs and elegant turns of phrase. He has an expressive voice that can't be ignored. "Just Us Kids," his most recent studio album, came out last year.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Sept. 23: **James McMurtry** (see Maxwell's).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9680)—"MoMA MiXX," a new series that pairs artists and musicians in an attempt to turn this temple of high culture into a playpen for well-heeled hipsters, gets under way on Sept. 26 with d.j. sets by the painter **Mickalene Thomas**, the multimedia artist **Derrick Adams**, the local dance-music group **Hercules and Love Affair**, and others.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Sept. 23: **Moby**, who led the techno movement to a commercial peak in the waning days of the last decade with his watershed album, "Play," continues to make distinctive, emotive music. His latest release, "Wait for Me," came out earlier this year. Sept. 29: The **Yeah Yeah Yeahs** (see Radio City Music Hall).

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—Sept. 23: Many a rail-thin, bearded hipster gasped upon hearing the news that Brooklyn's **Yeah Yeah Yeahs**

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

LORD AND HORDE

Among the "Recent Film Acquisitions" at MOMA is "The Lord of the Rings," which screens there in its entirety on Sept. 25-26. Peter Jackson's Tolkien trilogy is still a novelty of sorts, released in the first years of the new century;

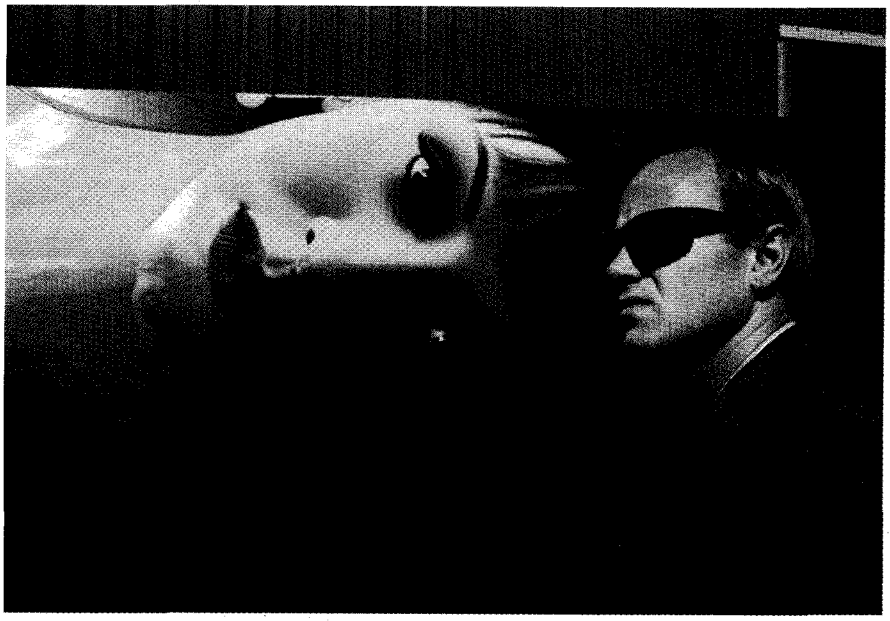
JASHAR AWAN

has it really earned its place beside the monoliths of the last? If so, it is precisely because the whole saga, for all the newfangled flourishes of C.G.I., harks back so unashamedly to older fanglings. The visual grammar of the assault on Helm's Deep, in the second film, switching from majestic long shots of siege ladders to details of individual defiance, is barely changed from the way in which D. W. Griffith mounted the fall of Babylon in "Intolerance," almost ninety years before. Epic, in short, demands its own style, and sets its own traps. Where the modern film wins is in the marshalling of sound; we need an orchestra to cover Griffith's silent action, but Jackson, requiring a wrathful army for Helm's Deep, bravely ventured onto a cricket pitch, during a break, and asked twenty-five thousand fans to roar in unison. They obliged.

—*Anthony Lane*

were abandoning rock on their third album in favor of keyboard-laden disco rhythms. While "It's Blitz!" does downplay the shock-haired guitarist Nick Zinner's signature riffs, the end results are no less mesmerizing than the trio's explosive early material. Expect the exuberant front woman, Karen O, to deliver a triumphant performance at this major home-town show.

RUMSEY PLAYFIELD
Central Park, mid-Park at 72nd St. (800-745-3000)—Sept. 25-26: The canny French quartet **Phoenix** plays a hook-laden brand of eighties-influenced synth pop with an appealingly contemporary indie-rock swagger. With **Passion Pit.**



Dennis Hopper's photograph of James Rosenquist, taken in 1964, at Shafrazi.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Sept. 24: **James McMurtry** (see Maxwell's). Sept. 26: The expanding soul-music party Dig Deeper, coming off two grand nights at the Bell House, moves from its Clinton Hill home to this Park Slope club. The headliner is **Marva Whitney,** whom James Brown used to refer to as "Soul Sister No. 1" and who last performed in New York City in 1969, at the Apollo Theatre.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Sept. 24: **Porcupine Tree** is an experimental British outfit that has a modern take on the progressive rock of the seventies.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Sept. 22-Oct. 24: **Karen Akers,** the doyen of New York cabaret, performs the music of Cole Porter. The polished sophistication shared by the composer and the singer makes them a perfect match.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Sept. 22-27: The virtuosic saxophonist and clarinettist **Paquito D'Rivera.** The equally skilled harpist **Edmar Castaneda** and his trio are the openers.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through Sept. 26: The Broadway star **Kelli O'Hara** ("South Pacific," "Light in the Piazza") takes charge of this intimate, hallowed room.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Sept. 23-27: Despite the critical support that greeted her arrival in the eighties, above-board success has eluded the singer **Carmen Lundy.** A strong contingent of players, including the pianist **Geri Allen** and the saxophonist **Bobby Watson,** are here to support this outstanding vocalist.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Sept. 23-Oct. 3: **Mary Wilson,** a founding member of the Supremes, who once stood proudly alongside Diana Ross and Florence Ballard, brings a touch of Motown magic to New York City.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Sept. 24-27: **L'image** is a quintet that unites formerly ubiquitous figures of the jazz-pop recording sessions of the nineteen-seventies and eighties. The vibraphonist Mike Mainieri, the keyboardist Warren Bernhardt, the guitarist Dave Spinoza, the bassist Tony Levin, and the drummer Steve Gadd may not be as visible as they once were, but they all remain at the top of their game.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Sept. 26: **Ornette Coleman,** like his fellow free-jazz practitioner Cecil Taylor, has maintained his position as a musical iconoclast some half century after he initially shook things up, in the late fifties. The alto saxophonist—and occasional violinist and trumpeter—still makes use of a quartet utilizing two basses and a drummer: the same instrumentation found on "Sound Grammar," his Pulitzer Prize-winning 2006 album. Here, as on the recording, the acoustic bassist is **Tony Falanga** and the drummer is Ornette's son, **Denardo;** the ringer is the electric bassist **Al MacDowell,** from Coleman's earlier Prime Time band. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Sept. 24-27: The **Barry Harris** trio. Harris, a revered second-generation bebop pianist, is as close to the genuine spirit of the genre as any musician working today. The bassist **Ray Drummond** and the drummer **Leroy Williams** make up his redoubtable rhythm section.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—Sept. 25: The opportunity to hear the gifted alto saxophonist **David Binney** in this gloriously unamplified room is always welcome; the chance to hear him supported by the drummer **Brian Blade** is sure to be a treat.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Sept. 22-25 and Sept. 27: The **Billy Hart** quartet. A behind-the-scenes giant of jazz percussion, Hart brings his vast experience of working with everyone from Wes Montgomery to Pharoah Sanders to his own tight-knit bands. Note: On Sept. 26 the singer **Barbra Streisand** is making in her first appearance here in forty-eight years (in 1961 she shared a night with Miles Davis). Her show will call on material from her new jazz-inflected album, "Love Is the Answer." Tickets, alas, were available only through the diva's Web site, and they are long gone.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Vermeer's Masterpiece 'The Milkmaid.'"** Through Nov. 29. ♦ **"Looking In: Robert Frank's 'The Americans.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Augustus Saint-Gaudens in the Metropolitan Museum of Art."** Through Nov. 15. ♦ **"Cinnabar: The Chinese Art of Carved Lacquer."** Through Feb. 21. ♦ **"Watteau, Music, and Theater."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Monet's Water Lilies."** Through April 12. ♦ **"In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976."** Through Oct. 5. ♦ **"Ron Arad: No Discipline."** Through Oct. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kandinsky."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Gabriele Münter and Vasily Kandinsky, 1902-14: A Life in Photographs."** Through Jan. 13. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Patricia Cronin: Harriet Hosmer, Lost and Found."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Reflections in the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time."** Through Jan. 3. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Thomas Chambers (1808-1869): American Marine and Landscape Painter."** Opens Sept. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan."** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

DIA AT THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA
Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-926-2234)—**"Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: Chronotopes & Dioramas."** Opens Sept. 23. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 4:30, and Sundays 1-4.)

THE DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166.)—**"Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World."** Through Dec. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

GREY ART GALLERY
100 Washington Sq. E. (212-998-6780)—**"Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya."** Through Dec. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6, Saturdays, 11 to 5, and Wednesday evenings until 8.)

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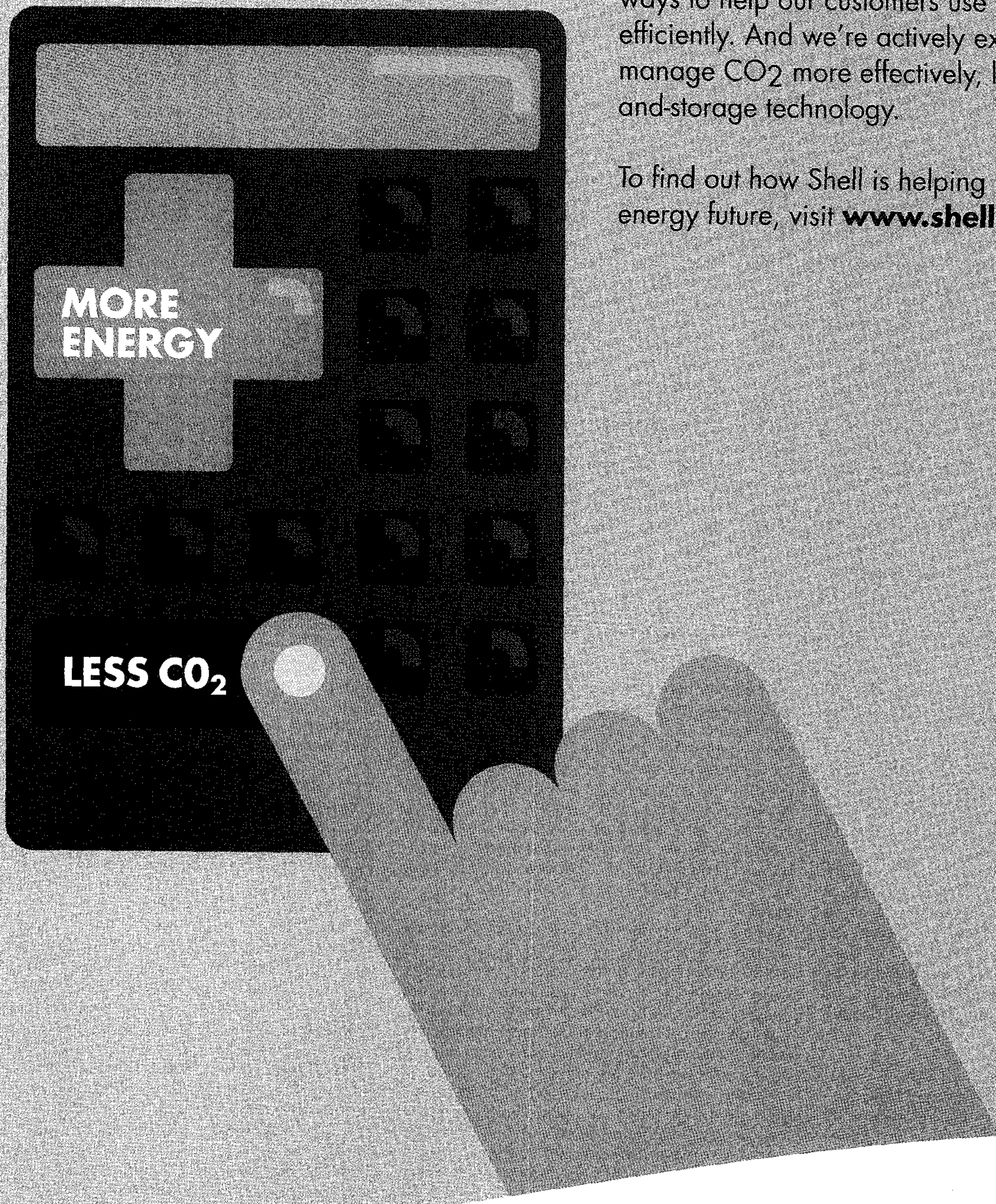


JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"Rite Now: Sacred and Secular in Video."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust."** Through Oct. 1. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"William Blake's World: 'A New Heaven Is Begun.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Celebrating Puccini."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Focus: Oskar Kokoschka."** Through Oct. 5. ♦ **"Selections from the Permanent Collection."** Through Oct. 5. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Emory Douglas: Black Panther."** Through Oct. 18. ♦ **"Intersections Intersected: The Photography of David Goldblatt."** Through Oct. 11. ♦ **"Rigo 23: The Deeper They Bury Me, the Louder My Voice Becomes."** Through Oct. 21. ♦ **"Dorothy Iannone: Lioness."** Through Oct. 18. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"A Voyage of Growth and Discovery: Mike Kelley and Michael Smith."** Through Dec. 30. ♦ **"In Practice Fall 2009."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Hurvin Anderson."** Through Oct. 25. ♦ **"Artists in Residence: Khalif Kelly, Adam Pendleton, Dawit L. Petros."** Through Oct. 25. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JOE BRAINARD
Brainard (1942-94) stopped exhibiting his work publicly in the late seventies. It's not hard to guess why: in an era of grand gestures and monumental scale, his collages were intimate, made with such barely-there materials as playing cards, postage stamps, magazine clippings, food wrappers, and touches of ink and watercolor. Nods to Synthetic Cubism abound; the proliferation of banal food motifs recalls the Pop painter Wayne Thiebaud. A tiny gouache of a moon-bathed landscape is just as arresting as the show's chef d'oeuvre, displayed in a clear plastic wall case: dozens of intricate collages, each about the size of a matchbook. Through Oct. 10. (Baumgold, 60 E. 66th St. 212-861-7338.)

BRASSAÏ
Brassaï's photographs of Paris in the thirties, nearly all of which were taken after dark, have come to define the seamy, seductive glamour of that city's night life. In these marvellous black-and-white images, cafés, night clubs, brothels, and public sidewalks become stage sets for charged, frequently erotic encounters. Among the nearly forty vintage prints gathered here are some of Brassaï's most vivacious pictures, including several little-known shots of couples at dance halls. There are also a few surprises, including three closeups of melted soap and a twist of raw cotton that slip between Surrealism, science fiction, and pornography. Through Oct. 17. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070.)

NICHOLAS NIXON
Nixon used a 1946 view camera to make the black-and-white prints in his latest show, which is divided between two very different but oddly complementary bodies of work, both from the past two years. Views of downtown Boston, taken from elevated vantage points, emphasize often jarring juxtapositions between old and new. Alongside these studies in urban density are self-portraits made at such close range that Nixon's face becomes a landscape—his beard wild underbrush, his gaping mouth a tar pit—pierced by enormous, all-seeing eyes. Through Oct. 24. (Pace MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

Short List

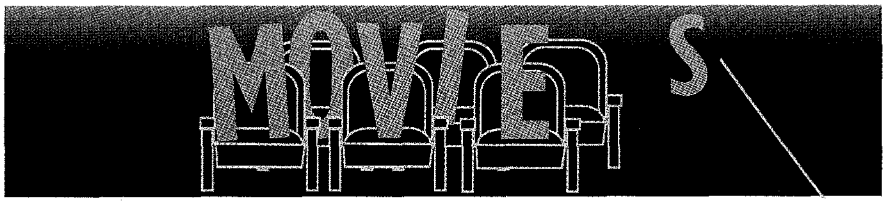
MILTON AVERY: DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111. Through Oct. 3. **TIM DAVIS:** Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444. Through Oct. 24. **BYRON DOBELL:** W. M. Brady, 22 E. 80th St. 212-249-7212. Through Sept. 26. **JACQUES HENRI LARTIGUE:** Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through Oct. 24. **SARAH MCENEANEY:** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through Oct. 24. **SALLY MANN:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Oct. 31. **KARIN SCHNEIDER:** Roth, 160A E. 70th St. 212-717-9067. Through Nov. 7. **CY TWOMBLY:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Oct. 31. **"SILENT PICTURES":** James Gallery, CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Ave., at 34th St. 212-817-7138. Through Oct. 11. **"SOMETHING ABOUT MARY":** Gallery Met, Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-799-3100, ext. 2847. Through Jan. 31.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ORLY GENGER
Genger's reactionary relationship with minimalism derives from (and dilutes) the feminist critique pioneered in the nineties by artists like Janine Antoni. A massive cube of black nylon climbing rope is squeezed between two columns and ringed, ponderously, by industrial fans, which blast the sculpture—and visitors—with air. The piece inevitably evokes Tony Smith's iconic steel sculpture "Die," and the minimalism-as-machismo analogy is underscored by its title, "Reg," after the 1965 winner of the Mr. Universe contest. A video documents a performance in which Genger, encased in a plaster block, attempts to free herself with a hatchet; its ends when she's exhausted to the point of inertia, an apt metaphor for her show. Through Oct. 24. (Goldston, 530 W. 25th St. 212-206-7887.)

JOANNE GREENBAUM
This exuberant show of big abstract paintings borrows its title from television—"Hollywood Squares"—and it's as unabashedly entertaining as it is accomplished. The colorful canvases layer oil and acrylic, opaque brushwork and water-thin drips, hard edges and nervous lines, erasure and accumulation. In the process, they throw down the gauntlet to digital technology—it's hard to conceive of an imaging program with more versatility than Greenbaum's hand. What ensues is a game show of sorts, a quiz about painting, from Matisse to Mondrian to Morris Louis, in which the answer is always "all of the above." Through Oct. 31. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

TODD HIDO
Hido's American landscapes—fallow fields, empty roads, a few bare trees—are seen in passing through dirty windshields, so his photographs appear smudged and indistinct. The effect is self-consciously painterly, recalling nineteenth-century pictorialism, but it's nearly drained of romance, and the vistas are resolutely ordinary. Wintry light and wet weather combine for an underwater feeling, as if we were peering through a fish tank at a place that rarely sees sun. In the front space, Nicolai Howalt's "Car Crash Studies" have echoes of Weegee and John Chamberlain, but some of the material is so raw it resists aesthetic transformation. Through Oct. 24. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)



DVD NOTES
IMITATION OF LOVE

The Belgian director Chantal Akerman's 1975 melodrama, **"Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles"** (Criterion), which runs more than three hours, is still shockingly original in its style, politics, and tone. But, now that its methods have become a cornerstone of art-house cinema, its aesthetic pleasures, emotional impact, and personal significance come to the fore.

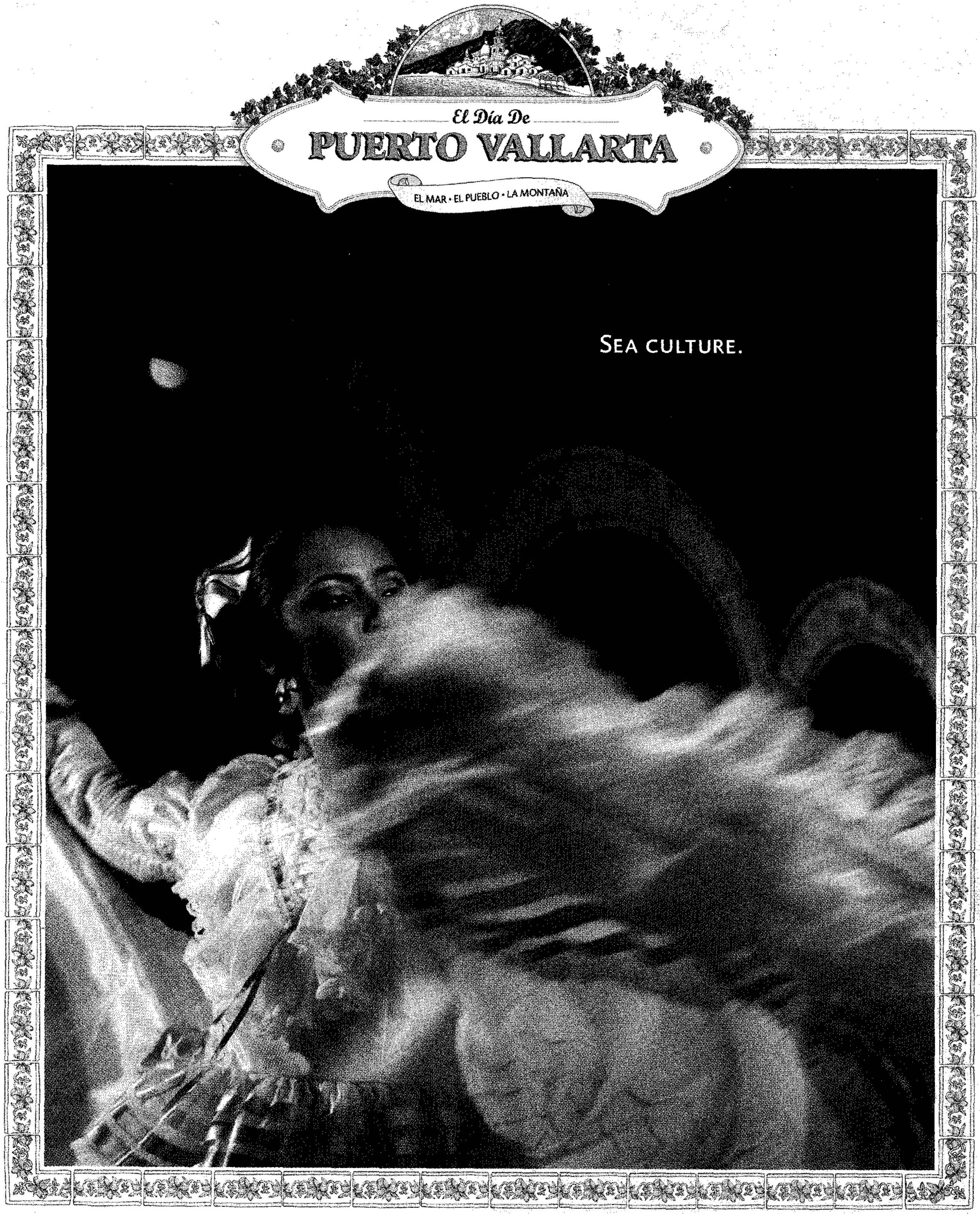
The title character, a middle-aged widow (Delphine Seyrig), supports her adolescent son in middle-class comfort by prostituting herself, daily, at home, while he is at school. Akerman depicts Jeanne on her myriad rounds—cooking, cleaning, shopping, shining her son's shoes, receiving her clients—and films her doing these chores, in their entirety, usually in single long, static, frontally framed takes. With an exquisite control of time, she intricately reimagines—in meticulous detail—what most conventional stories leave out; for all the apparent banality of the action, the staging of it is a triumph of domestic choreography. (It's no surprise that Akerman went on to make a documentary about Pina Bausch.)

The result is a molecular melodrama, in which the purchase of potatoes and a trip to the post office have the same dramatic weight as deeds of high moral moment. Indeed, food plays a key role; medium shots of Jeanne making breaded veal cutlets and preparing a meat loaf play like grim refractions of Julia Child's "The French Chef." Despite the narrowed spectrum of expression and the intentionally flattened palette of performance, language, and visual conception, the movie is a sensual delight. Babette Mangolte's extraordinary photography blends soft and harsh light to reveal a diverse domestic landscape of reflection and shadow, matte and gloss, rendering the apartment and its bland, weighty furnishings as expressive as the actors.

A final tableau of Jeanne in radically changed circumstances has an involuted operatic splendor that suggests an X-ray of a Douglas Sirk image. Astonishingly, Akerman was only twenty-four when she made this influential, sui-generis masterwork. For all its artistic and erotic audacity, her film plays like a tender tribute to alienated housewives everywhere, and especially to her mother (whom she interviews, on-camera, as one of the many extras on a second disk).

—*Richard Brody*

STEVE POWERS



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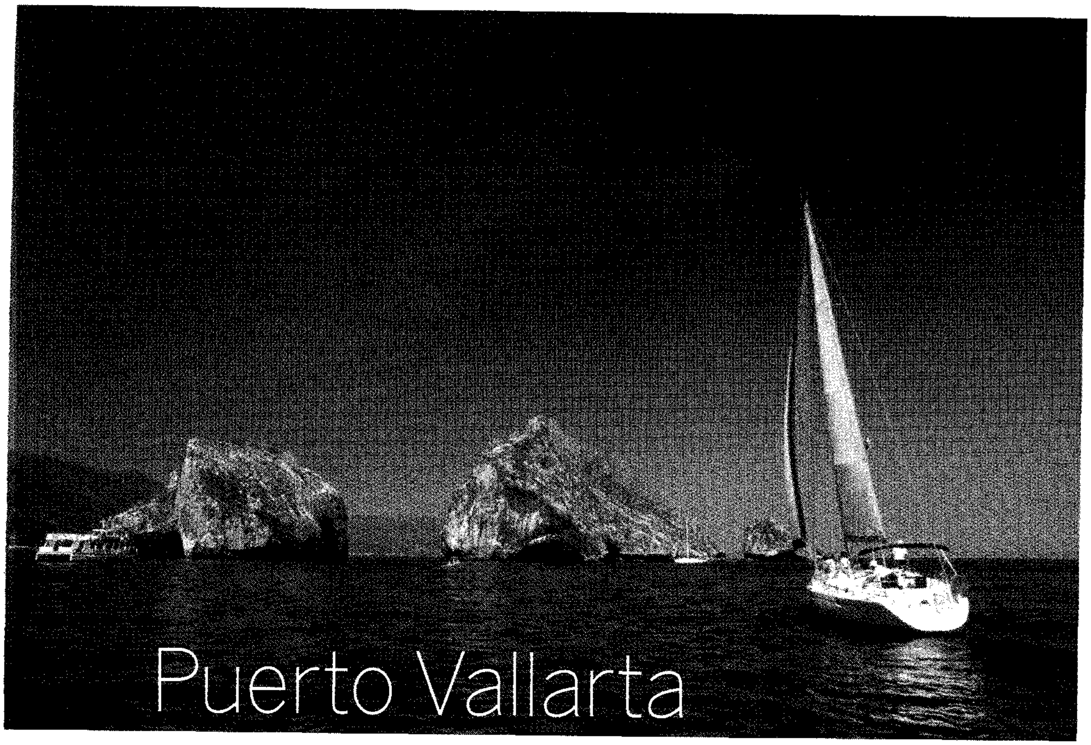
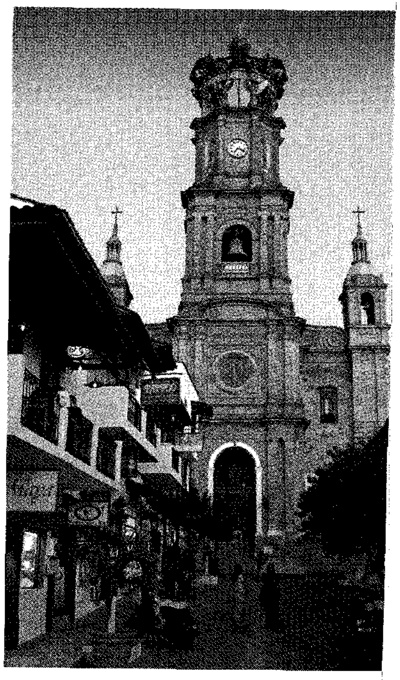


Puerto Vallarta

Indulging in Paradise

Water-sports enthusiasts converge on Puerto Vallarta's Los Arcos, near Mismaloya; Our Lady of Guadalupe Church is the city's crowning glory; a colorful carving commemorates the annual Dia de los Muertos holiday



CLOCKWISE, *FROM TOP LEFT:* LOS ARCOS IMAGE COURTESY OF PUERTO VALLARTA TOURISM; OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE STREET SCENE ©DAVID MIKULIN; CARVING ©SARAH McGEE

MOVIE BUFFS WILL LONG RECALL PUERTO VALLARTA as the setting of John Huston's classic "The Night of the Iguana"—and for Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor's torrid romance during its filming. But seduction is a principal player on the stage of the Pacific Coast landscape, where twenty-five miles of beaches curve around the Bahía de Banderas and sea and sand are embraced by the palm-covered foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental.

A stroll along the *malecón,* the seaside promenade that rims the cobblestone streets of the former fishing village, provides views from multiple vantages. To the south are the popular, pristine **Playa de los Muertos** and **Playa Olas Altas** as well as more secluded coves, including whales, where "Iguana" was shot. To the north are scenic and challenging golf courses such as **Vista Vallarta** designed by Jack Nicklaus and Tom Weiskopf as well as a half dozen others, including the magnificent **Marina Vallarta** designed by American architect Joe Finger. The center of town is a lively warren of tile-roofed shops, restaurants, and art galleries. Beyond them are the mountains, which you can explore on foot, horseback, or bike—or from the treetop height of zip lines over the river.

The ocean has its own life to reveal. Snorkelers and divers boat out to **Los Arcos**, a group of surf-sculpted rocky islands, and the surrounding marine preserve. They are joined by bird-watchers on excursions to **Las Marietas**, the islands at the entrance to the bay, which are known for deep underwater caverns and thrilling sightings of blue-footed boobies and green macaws.

November brings a major international fishing tournament to Puerto Vallarta—a celebration of the area's sailfish and marlin catch. In winter, humpback whales come south from Alaska to Banderas Bay, where they mate, bear the calves conceived the previous year, and rivet visitors' attention.

The fashionable turn that tequila has taken, from the un-aged liquor of margaritas to extra-*añejo* varieties worthy of brandy snifters, might prompt you to sign up for a tour from Puerto Vallarta through the blue agave fields to a nearby tequila distillery. But the most romantic backdrop for sipping is the sea, viewed from a table at one of Puerto Vallarta's many connoisseur-quality restaurants. From a perch at **Le Kliff**, a favorite for fresh seafood, you might glimpse dolphins, whales, or giant manta rays. **La Palapa** brings elegance and Pacific Rim cuisine to Los Muertos Beach. French tradition is the undercurrent of creativity at **Café des Artistes**; contemporary Mexican at **Los Xitomates**. During the ten days of the annual **Festival Gourmet International** in mid-November, you can attend tastings at these restaurants and a dozen more—adding yet another indulgence to paradise.

Plan your trip at visitpuertovallarta.com or go to visitmexico.com

MÉXICO TIME TO go!

PUERTO VALLARTA
Where Mexico Comes to Life

JUERGEN TELLER
Teller, whose last exhibition in this space was packed with photographs, shows just nine very large color pictures this time. Shot after-hours at the Louvre for the French magazine *Paradis*, they feature the actress Charlotte Rampling and the model Raquel Zimmermann posed stark naked among the museum's masterworks. Photographed in Teller's trademark style—candid, awkward, and garishly lit—the works are at once chilly and comic, especially when the women loiter in front of the "Mona Lisa" as if they were passengers waiting at a bus stop. The project is certainly audacious, but, like much of the artist's long-running Marc Jacobs ad campaign, it's a clever stunt and nothing more. Through Oct. 17. (Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923.)

Short List

JANINE ANTONI: Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through Oct. 24. **ALEX BAG:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through Oct. 24. **BERNADETTE CORPORATION:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through Oct. 17. **TROY BRAUNTUCH:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Oct. 17. **RAOUL DE KEYSER:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Oct. 24. **GEORGE GROSZ:** Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190. Through Oct. 31. **DENNIS HOPPER:** Shafrazi, 544 W. 26th St. 212-274-9300. Through Oct. 24. **ROSY KEYSER:** Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Opens Sept. 23. **ROBERT KINMONT:** Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave. at 18th St. 212-367-7474. Through Oct. 17. **JOSIAH MCELHENY:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through Oct. 17. **TAKASHI MURAKAMI / ANSELM REYLE:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through Oct. 24. **JAMES TURRELL:** Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through Oct. 17. **"DON'T PERISH":** Koenig Projekte, 541 W. 23rd St. 212-334-9255. Through Oct. 17. **"ONE MINUTE MORE":** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through Oct. 31.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

SARA GREENBERGER RAFFERTY
Looking for an antidote to art about art? Try this sleeper of an exhibition about comedy. Rafferty, a standout on the group-show circuit for the past several years, makes her impressive gallery début with loaded pictures of lowbrow subjects: a whoopee cushion, a *TV Guide*, Goldie Hawn circa "Laugh In." Though they're technically photographs, Rafferty manipulates her images to the point of distortion. Some could be mistaken for watercolors (a roadkill-flat rubber chicken); others appear badly stained (Madeline Kahn's face, reduced to a spectral smear). Rafferty has coined a revelatory new style—call it slapstick grotesque—that peels away the veneer of the comic to expose the darkness below. Through Oct. 25. (Uffner, 47 Orchard St. 212-274-0064.)

Short List

TAUBA AUERBACH: Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through Oct. 17. **JESSICA DICKENSON:** Fuentes, 35 St. James Pl. 212-577-1201. Through Sept. 27. **RACHEL FOULLON:** Beauchene, 163 Eldridge St. 212-375-8043. Through Oct. 18. **K8 HARDY:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through Oct. 11. **ALEX KATZ:** Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441. Through Oct. 24. **MY BARBARIAN:** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through Oct. 18. **JENNIFER NOCON:** Williams, 313 W. 4th St. 212-229-2757. Through Oct. 31. **LISA OPPENHEIM:** Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290. Through Oct. 10. **MICHAEL PATTERSON-CARVER:** Small A Projects, 261 Broome St. 212-274-0761. Through Oct. 18. **JON PESTONI / ZAK PREKOP:** Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564. Through Oct. 18. **"WE ARE HERE SHARING OUR DREAMING":** 80 Washington Square East Galleries, 80 Washington Sq. E., at W. 4th St. 212-998-5747. Through Sept. 26. **"WOOD":** Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977. Through Oct. 24.

DANCE

"FALL FOR DANCE"
As in years past, the festival is sold out, but don't despair: there will be a line for returns before each performance. Companies paying tribute to Diaghilev's Ballets Russes will be the Boston Ballet, with Nijinsky's "Afternoon of a Faun" on Tuesday and Wednesday, and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, with their take on Nijinska's powerful and seldom seen "Les Noces" (1922) on Thursday and Friday; Basil Twist gives us his puppet "Petrushka" on Saturday and Sunday. Other companies performing this week include Paul Taylor, Batsheva, Morphoses, and Tangueros del Sur, featuring the fabulous Gabriel Misse, showing off his quicksilver footwork. For a complete schedule, see www.nycitycenter.org. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Sept. 22-26 at 8 and Sept. 27 at 3. Through Oct. 3.)

RAIMUND HOGHE/"BOLÉRO VARIATIONS"
The longtime dramaturge of Pina Bausch gives New York its first glimpse of his work as a choreographer. Ravel's insistent theme weaves in and out in various versions—standard, jazz, ice-skating competition—while dancers share the stage but inhabit isolated worlds, responding to the music with generally slow, minimal posturing and lots of walking. Shirtless, Hoghe confronts the viewer with his spinal anomaly and a voice-over about music in Auschwitz. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Sept. 23-25 at 7:30.)

JILLIAN SWEENEY
In her solo performance "This Could Be It," Sweeney, a young dancer with a gift for comic frustration, addresses the awkward terrain of self-awareness, the gap between the ideal and the actual self. The sound and video of Brian Rogers are an integral element of Sweeney's storytelling. (The Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 212-352-3101. Sept. 23-26 at 8.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"
For its latest collaboration with the Miller Theatre, the Guggenheim's series offers a multidisciplinary evening inspired by *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach*, the extraordinary journal edited by Kandinsky and Franz Marc in 1912, which brought together essays on art and music, Expressionist prints, and musical scores. Sarah Rothenberg and the soprano Susan Narucki will perform songs by composers related to the *Blaue Reiter* movement (Schoenberg, Webern, Berg). And Karole Armitage—no stranger to sophisticated artistic collaborations—will present new choreography set to the first movement of Schoenberg's incipiently atonal String Quartet in F-Sharp, which will be played by the Brentano String Quartet. (Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Sept. 23 and Sept. 25 at 8.)

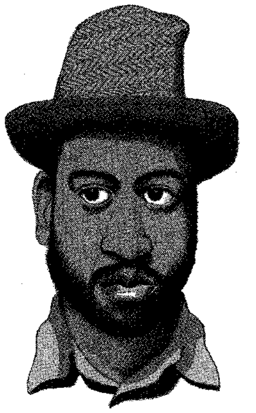
CATHERINE GALLANT/DANCE
Gallant, who is also the director of the company Dances by Isadora, brings her eponymous company to Joyce SoHo, to perform the Isadora Duncan solo "Revolutionary," as well as Anna Sokolow's Duncan-inspired solo "Andante Amoroso" and an excerpt from José Limón's "Dances for Isadora" (performed by a guest from the Limón Company, Kristen Foote). The second half of the program features Gallant's own choreography. (155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Sept. 24-26 at 8 and Sept. 27 at 3.)

DANCENOW [NYC] FESTIVAL
Phase two of this year's festival of downtown dance is an indoor/outdoor program co-curated by the funky DUO Theatre. As part of a rollicking East Village block party known as the FAB! Festival, a dozen or so companies (including the Bang Group and Heidi Latsky) will present short bits (seven minutes or less) at two locations: on an outdoor stage on E. 4th St. and inside the DUO. For a full schedule, visit www.fabnyc.org. (E. 4th St. between Bowery and 2nd Ave. 212-228-4670. Sept. 26 at noon.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
DRAMATIC ROOTS

Unlike his contemporary Tarell Alvin McCraney, the brilliant playwright Thomas Bradshaw (whose drama "The Bereaved" is currently at the Wild Project) usually has no truck with folklore. And when he does incorporate it, it's to lampoon the treacly sweetness of black "roots" drama—which explains itself as a thing of the earth, of voodoo and mysticism rather than social conditioning—which Bradshaw views as a kind of pathology. Born in 1980 in Short Hills, New Jersey, Bradshaw writes absurdist dramas—beginning with his incendiary 2005 work, "Prophet," and continuing with his magnificent 2007 piece, "Strom Thurmond Is Not a Racist"—that are as flat as soap operas, one of the genres that his plays, with their reductive action and skepticism about naturalism and psychology, allude to. But it's fairly easy to get beyond Bradshaw's purposefully thin surfaces—unless, of course, you're unwilling to look at what contorts all America: racism, and the bullshit notion that it doesn't affect our view of sex and love in a so-called post-racial country.

—*Hilton Als*



PATRICK LONG

RAIMUND HOGHE/"L'APRÈS-MIDI"
In addition to his presentation at Dance Theatre Workshop (see above), the German choreographer brings his "L'Après-midi" to Danspace Project. Almost a solo for Emmanuel Eggermont, the dance branches off from Debussy's tone poem, played twice, into "Claire de Lune" and Mahler lieder. The choreography cannily employs Nijinsky's famously flat and hieratic attitudes, as Eggermont slowly and deliberately suggests an archaic statue animated in segments. Stretched thin in spots, the work has an exquisite beauty, especially in its concentration on wrists and fingers—all set against the choreographer, who periodically rearranges two glasses of milk. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Sept. 26 at 4.)

DESERT CARAVAN
From Rajasthan, in the dry West of India, come representatives of the region's hereditary clans of musicians, playing wind, string, and percussion instruments in a tradition of ecstatic Sufi song. Joining them is the lovely Suva Devi, who offers a snake-charming dance, mild contortionism, and dervish-like spinning in her voluminous, embroidered skirts. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-545-7536. Sept. 26 at 8.)

EMIO GRECO | PC
The high-concept, Netherlands-based company extends its series riffing on Dante's Divine Comedy into "[purgatorio] POPOPERA"—the part between hell and paradise. It's certainly a trial. Michael Gordon's score offers some hope, ranging between suggestions of Philip Glass, Led Zeppelin, art song, and punk. But the dancers, that pack of lost souls, partially nude in tight mesh, look risible whether carrying guitars or strumming them. In her lamé dress, the soprano Michaela Riener offers little Virgilian guidance through the sound and fury. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Sept. 29 at 7:30. Through Oct. 4.)

MARIA HASSABI
With "Solo," the Cyprus-born choreographer investigates the line between the sexualized posturing of fashion models and the display of the body in contemporary dance. Part of a diptych, the second half of which will be performed in November. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Sept. 29 at 7:30. Through Oct. 4.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Julie Taymor's production of **"Die Zauberflöte"** has enough "Lion King"-like visual allure to please children and just enough mystery to bring the adults along with them. A favorite from its first run, it returns under the supple baton of the Québécois conductor Bernard Labadie, with a cast that features Susanna Phillips, Erika Miklósa, Matthias Klink, and Christopher Maltman. Sung in German. (Sept. 23 at 8 and Sept. 26 at 1.) ♦ The first new production of the season is of **"Tosca,"** a début for the director Luc Bondy, who will have to work hard to erase the memories of the Franco Zeffirelli staging, one of his finest for the Met. Karita Mattila sings the role of the *prima donna assoluta*, with the tenor Marcelo Álvarez (as Cavaradossi) and the baritone George Gagnidze (as Scarpia), competing for her loyalty; James Levine, the rock of the company, conducts. (Sept. 24 and Sept. 28 at 8.) ♦ Few of the Met's productions have been more reliably successful than Jonathan Miller's go at **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** but this run will be full of débuts: those of Emma Bell (in the role of the Countess) and the Israeli conductor Dan Ettinger, as well as the house role débuts of Danielle de Niese (Susanna) and Isabel Leonard (Cherubino). Figaro and the Count are in the trusty hands of John Relyea and Bo Skovhus. (Sept. 26 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

SYMPHONY SPACE: "LA BOHÈME"
The Upper West Side cultural center has moved squarely into the broadcast-opera craze. The first offering this season is a showing of Robert Dornhelm's film version of Puccini's verismo romance, with Anna Netrebko and Rolando Villazón. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Sept. 23 at 7 and Sept. 27 at 3.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Alan Gilbert fills his second week as the orchestra's music director with a program of extraordinary density: Brahms's Violin Concerto (with the formidable soloist Frank Peter Zimmermann) and Schoenberg's late-Romantic "Pelleas and Melisande," a Strauss tone poem on steroids. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Sept. 24 at 7:30, Sept. 25 at 11 A.M., and Sept. 26 at 8.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC PHILHARMONIA
It's back-to-class time at the prestigious conservatory, which begins its classical performance season with a concert led by Mei-Ann Chen (the Atlanta Symphony's assistant conductor) that features music by Offenbach, Dvořák (the ebullient Eighth Symphony), and Bartók (the rhapsodic Violin Concerto No. 2, with Jin Woo Lee). (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. 917-493-4428. Sept. 25 at 7:30.)

(LE) POISSON ROUGE: GIL SHAHAM AND ADELE ANTHONY
Shaham, a Carnegie Hall denizen, and his wife (also a violinist) make the pilgrimage to the über-cool West Village club, where they will indulge in the colorful and sweet-toned music of Pablo de Sarasate, including such classics as "Carmen Fantasy" and "Navarra"; they are backed by the stylish young chamber orchestra the Knights. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.org. Sept. 29 at 7.)

RECITALS

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "A VIENNESE EVENING"
Adding a bit of froth to a lean time for classical music, the Society opens its fortieth season with a concert that pays tribute to the city of *Sacher Torte* and Sigmund Freud. The soprano Dawn Upshaw is the special guest, singing in the finale of Mahler's Symphony No. 4 (in the Erwin Stein arrangement) and in the world première of David Bruce's "The North Wind Was a Woman" (an exception to the Viennese theme); the program also features music by Beethoven and Schubert and a pair of Strauss waltzes. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Sept. 23 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE: "THE BLUE RIDER IN PERFORMANCE"
Just before the First World War, Vassily Kandinsky published "The Blue Rider Almanac," a volume that brought art works, critical essays, and musical scores together into a unified statement that defined the Expressionist movement. The pianist Sarah Rothenberg, the soprano Susan Narucki, and the Brentano String Quartet open the Miller season by offering interpretations of works by Schoenberg (including the Quartet No. 2 in F-Sharp Minor), Berg, Webern, and Scriabin ("Vers la Flamme") in an evening that also features the contributions of the lighting and set designer Marcus Doshi and the choreographer Karole Armitage. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Sept. 23 and Sept. 25 at 8.)

FIVE BOROUGHS MUSIC FESTIVAL: "MANNING THE CANON"
This recently established festival presents concerts that feature outstanding young performers in community venues, with programs that have a contemporary twist. The vocal-music magus Steven Blier accompanies a passel of persuasive singers—Lawrence Jones, Scott Murphree, Matt Boehler, and Matthew Worth—who offer songs on gay life by such composers as Blitzstein, Bolcom, Bernstein, Poulenc, and Cole Porter. (LGBT Community Center, 208 W. 13th St. Sept. 24 at 7:30. Tickets at the door.)

BROOKLYN CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY
Carmit Zori's series, an occasional competitor of the far busier Bargemusic, brings a bit of Gotham glamour to Brooklyn Heights by booking such Chamber Music Society regulars as the violist Paul

TABLES FOR TWO
WARREN 77

77 Warren St. (212-227-8994)—Officially, this new spot is a sports bar, but if you want to catch the Jets game, you'd be better off at Mudville 9, a few blocks away, where, no matter what seat you have, there's a clear view of the kickoff. The TVs at Warren 77 aren't as easy to see—they're set high, at neck-craning angles—and a full third of the space has no screens at all. The best vantage point, a middle section of comfy leather booths, carries a hefty five-hundred-dollar minimum to watch an entire sporting event. Even the décor—vintage klieg lights, white roses in vases along the wall, glossy color photographs of John McEnroe and Hulk Hogan, among others—seems to signify that the owners were more interested in style than sweat.

Perhaps that's not surprising, considering that Sean Avery—of the New York Rangers and, one off-season, *Vogue*—is a co-owner. "For me, to go to a bar to watch sports is really tough—sports bars in America can be kind of horrifying," he noted to style.com in June, shortly after Warren 77 opened, adding that the walls were also hung with Warhol and Arbus. But there is a sense that at least some of the clientele are there less for the fine art than for a glimpse of the man himself. "Your favorite hockey player is here!" hissed a man to his date one evening, as Avery entered, wearing a thin white T-shirt and a black satin jacket. "Oh my God, where?" she squealed.

With stadiums setting a new standard of what constitutes game fare, the sports bar can no longer slop out any old food. Here, the steak sandwich, swathed in mozzarella and served with a rich au jus, pairs tender meat with a soft ciabatta; the mac and cheese is buttery, with a crunchy layer of bread crumbs on top. The chopped salad, a bountiful mix of asparagus, avocado, egg, blue cheese, olives, and more, makes for a moment of incredulity—who gets to eat a satisfying salad while watching Federer get beat by Del Potro? On the other hand, the wings—a staple of the beer-and-football crowd—are a disappointment, gristly and far too spicy, even in the mild version. At least the burger gives the place some grease cred; there's a nice balance between the bun and the patty, with juicy meat and crisp toppings. It's almost enough to make you forget why you came here in the first place. "This is a bad sports bar," one visitor remarked recently. "Nobody is actually into the game." (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $12-$22.)

—Andrea Thompson

HONORE BROWN

Neubauer and the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott. They appear in a concert that features music by Dvořák (the ever-popular "American" Quartet) and Bartók (an obscure Quintet for Piano and Strings). (First Unitarian Church, Pierrepont St. at Monroe Pl. Sept. 25 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

TALEA ENSEMBLE: MUSIC BY KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN
The late avant-garde master, whose fusion of electronic and acoustic sound sources revolutionized postwar music, may be gone, but he's definitely not forgotten. In a concert sponsored by Stockhausen's estate, the ensemble performs the seminal "Kontakte," in a program that also includes works by the estimable Jonathan Harvey ("Tombeau de Messiaen") and James Tenney. (Roulette, 20 Greene St. Sept. 24 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

BARGEMUSIC
The Brooklyn chamber-music hub, gaining ground as a venue for new music, also likes to indulge its antiquarian side. In the latest concert of its "There and Then" series, the New York Consort of Viols offers music and readings that trace the Sephardic journey through Renaissance Europe, as well as modern works by Paul Ben-Haim and David Loeb. (Fulton Ferry Landing. 718-624-2083. Sept. 25 at 8. For full listings, see www.bargemusic.org.)

"YALE IN NEW YORK" SERIES: "THE CLASSICAL LEGACY OF BENNY GOODMAN"
The legendary swing clarinettist (who left his papers to the Yale School of Music) also had a classical side to his career of which he was proud. This concert celebrates his connection to the institution by offering a program of several works with which Goodman was associated—such as Bartók's "Contrasts" and Copland's Clarinet Concerto (performed by two superb soloists, Romie de Guise Langlois and David Shifrin), as well as works by Poulenc, Morton Gould, and Alan Shulman. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Sept. 26 at 7:30.)

NEW JUILLIARD ENSEMBLE
Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky, a gifted composer driven out of his native Uzbekistan by political oppression, has mixed profundity with humor in his latest work, "Path of Parables II: Woody Allen's Hassidic Tales," which employs a text from the author's "Getting Even" (read by the young actor Nathan Miller). Joel Sachs also directs new music by Chris Gendall, Errollyn Wallen, Elliott Sharp ("Points & Fields"), and Du Yun. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Sept. 26 at 8. Free tickets, which are required, are available at the box office.)

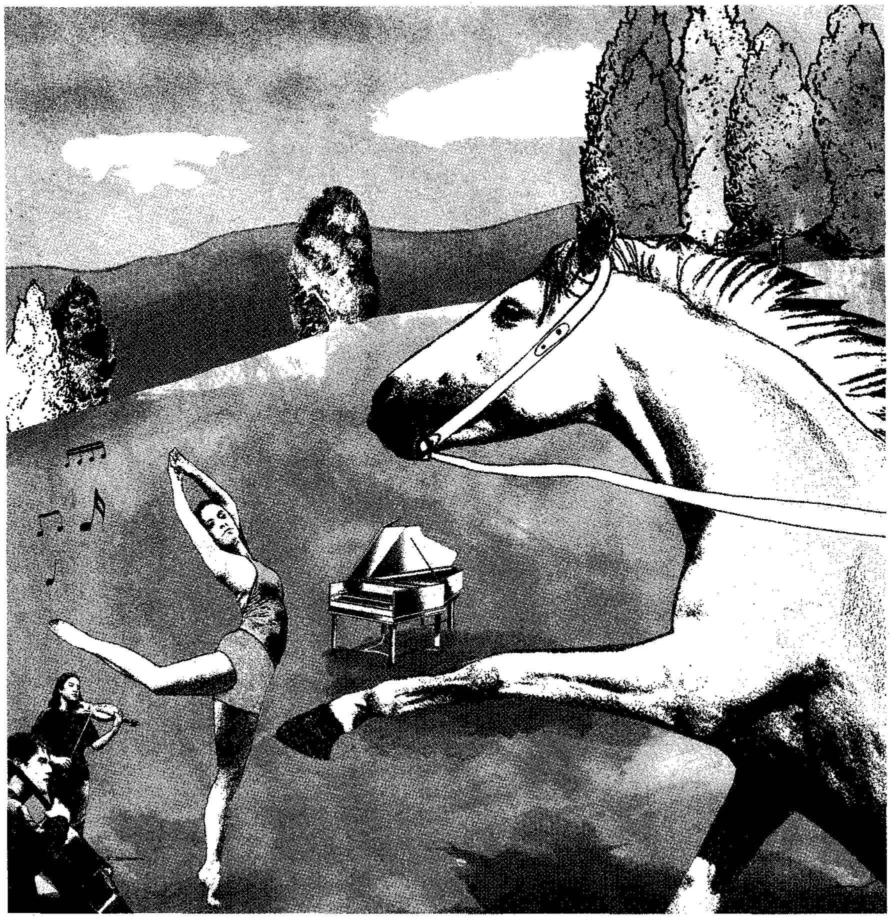
(LE) POISSON ROUGE: STEPHEN GOSLING AND DAVID SHIVELY
Two new-music virtuosos—on piano and percussion, respectively—who have never appeared together before marshal their talents for "Desert Landscapes," an evening of music on the experimentalist side by Andrew Byrne ("White Bone Country"), Peter Garland, and John Luther Adams. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Sept. 27 at 7:30.)

AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM: FRIEDRICH KLEINHAPL
The outstanding young Austrian cellist, a protégé of Valery Gergiev, is accompanied by the pianist Andreas Woyke in a free concert in the Forum's sleek little concert hall that features music by Beethoven (three sonatas), Oistein Sommerfeld, and Freidrich Gulda. (11 E. 52nd St. Sept. 29 at 7:30. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-319-5300.)

MOVIES OPENING

BLIND DATE
Stanley Tucci directed and stars in this drama, about a couple that attempts to reconnect through fantasy blind dates. Co-starring Patricia Clarkson. Opening Sept. 25. (In limited release.)

THE BLUE TOOTH VIRGIN
A drama, written and directed by Russell Brown, about an editor whose friendship with a writer is threatened by a dislike for his screenplay. Opening Sept. 25. (In wide release.)



"The Blue Rider in Performance," at Miller Theatre (see Classical and Dance).

TARA HARDY

BRIEF INTERVIEWS WITH HIDEOUS MEN
John Krasinski directed this adaptation of the book by David Foster Wallace, about an anthropologist (Julianne Nicholson) who attempts to understand her own love life by studying men. Opening Sept. 25. (In wide release.)

CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY
A documentary by Michael Moore about the current financial crisis and how it happened. Opening Sept. 23. (In limited release.)

CHELSEA ON THE ROCKS
Abel Ferrara directed this documentary, about the Chelsea Hotel and its famous residents. Opening Sept. 25. (Chelsea Cinemas.)

COCO BEFORE CHANEL
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 25. (In wide release.)

FAME
A remake of the 1980 musical, about the ambitions and romances of teen-agers at New York's High School of Performing Arts. Directed by Kevin Tancharoen; starring Naturi Naughton, Kay Panabaker, and Kelsey Grammer. Opening Sept. 25. (In wide release.)

I HOPE THEY SERVE BEER IN HELL
An adaptation of Taylor Max's novel, about a man whose misbehavior threatens to derail his best friend's engagement. Directed by Bob Gosse; starring Matt Czuchry, Jesse Bradford, and Geoff Stults. Opening Sept. 25. (In wide release.)

PANDORUM
In this science-fiction drama, two astronauts (Ben Foster and Dennis Quaid) awaken in space and find their memories and identities erased. Directed by Christian Alvart. Opening Sept. 25. (In wide release.)

THE PROVIDENCE EFFECT
A documentary, directed by Rollin Binzer, about a Chicago high school that helps underprivileged students succeed academically. Opening Sept. 25. (Empire 25.)

SURROGATES
Bruce Willis stars in this futuristic drama, about an F.B.I. agent who abandons his robot double to investigate a conspiracy. Directed by Jonathan Mostow; co-starring Radha Mitchell. Opening Sept. 25. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

BRIGHT STAR
In 1818, a half-educated but boldly self-possessed beauty named Fanny Brawne (Abbie Cornish) captures the admiration, and then the love, of a tubercular young man (Ben Whishaw). He's a most unpromising fellow: sometimes spirited and funny, yet often sunk in quiet and seemingly remote unhappiness. The writer-director, Jane Campion ("The Piano"), does not play up the irony that the young man, John Keats, would soon be known, despite much early dismissal of his work, as one of the greatest poets in English since Shakespeare and Milton. The movie is not the kind of portentous bio-pic in which history, like some sort of hooded eagle, perches on the shoulders of every scene, waiting to soar. As much as she can, Campion keeps the action day-by-day, small-scale, and casually lyrical. Many of Whishaw and Cornish's scenes together have a high-spirited delicacy that borders on the precious and then safely pulls back to the everyday. Campion makes only one serious mistake: Whishaw recites the lines "Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast / To feel for ever its soft swell and fall" when he is actually resting his head on Cornish's chest. The period re-creation, sure-handed yet unemphatic, is extraordinary. With Paul Schneider as Keats's protector and amanuensis, Charles Brown.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/21/09.) (In wide release.)

DISGRACE
In adapting J. M. Coetzee's celebrated 1999 novel, the screenwriter Anna Maria Monticelli and the director Steve Jacobs (who are husband and wife) have tried to create a visual tone analogous to his extraordinary prose—dry, spare, abruptly violent. The movie,

shot in South Africa and Australia, is skillful and tense, and the landscapes are magnificent, but the implacable rhythm of Coetzee's sentences, which makes the book impossible to put down, escapes the filmmakers, and would probably escape any filmmakers. John Malkovich is the played-out literature professor who is fired from a Cape Town university for sleeping with an undergraduate; the wonderful South African actress Jessica Haines is his tough-souled daughter, who lives deep in the country and takes him in. In the wake of the violence that ensues, the movie, like the book, poses several key questions: Who shall control the land of South Africa? Who will be the country's children? With Eriq Ebouaney as the black South African who shares the daughter's homestead.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

DISTRICT 9

This is the first feature from Neill Blomkamp, who sets it in his native Johannesburg—taking the ethnic tensions and economic inequalities that already exist there and throwing a fresh, unexpected irritant into the mix. For the first few minutes, the movie sounds and looks like a documentary, with a fidgety office worker called Wikus Van De Merwe (Sharlto Copley) discussing the relocation of aliens. We presume that this is bureaucratic shorthand for unwanted immigrants, and so, in a way, it is; but these are real aliens, from outer space—graceless, snarling bipeds known as "prawns." The wrath and suspicion they provoke among humans feel horribly familiar, and Blomkamp doesn't need to highlight the moral of his tale; instead, he quickens it into a bloody game of hide-and-seek, with Wikus himself becoming a disfigured outcast and, against all his instincts, seeking the aid of a prawn. Like the aliens browsing through refuse for weaponry and food, the film trawls for visual tactics of every kind, from news footage to clips from security cameras, and the result is something new: a startling, redoubtable thriller constructed on the cheap from a decaying world.—*Anthony Lane* (9/14/09) (In wide release.)

ECCENTRICITIES OF A BLOND HAIR GIRL

This recession-age fable, which revolves around love, work, family pressures, and hidebound traditions, is set in contemporary Lisbon but breathes the air of a dreamy, timeless romanticism—one that befits the long view of life taken by its hundred-year-old director, Manoel de Oliveira. The story, told in flashbacks, is framed by a train ride to a rural resort where Macário (Ricardo Trêpa) is going to recover from a shattered affair; he chooses to unburden himself to the stranger seated beside him. This quiet listener, played by Leonor Silveira—Oliveira's muse for the last two of his eight decades in cinema—begins the proceedings with a screen-piercing stroke of genius that turns a cliché into a marvel. Macário pours out to her his tale of working as an accountant at his uncle's sumptuous fabric shop and falling in love, from a distance and at first sight, with a coy young woman (Catarina Wallenstein) who's looking out a window across the street. She turns out to be a wealthy heiress, her house a lavish villa, and her cultural milieu one of great refinement and greater cruelty. Oliveira brings a dry, sensual elegance to this tale of hearts confounded by circumstances and silences, and he portrays social formalities as mating rituals for human animals on the verge of brutality. In Portuguese.—*Richard Brody* (New York Film Festival; Sept. 26-27.)

THE EXILES

Kent Mackenzie's miraculous independent film, made between 1958 and 1961 with scrounged film, borrowed equipment, donated services, and free labor, was, scandalously, not released commercially until 2008. Mackenzie, while a U.S.C. film student, befriended Native Americans who had left their reservations and towns for Los Angeles, and he persuaded them to reënact scenes from their own lives for the camera. The resulting drama, a Pilgrim's Progress of three characters through a night of urban loneliness and dissipation, has an epic grandeur and a monumental intimacy that belie its mere seventy-two minutes. Yvonne, who is pregnant and dreams of a better life for her child, drains away the hours watching B-Westerns in an all-night grind house while her layabout boyfriend, Homer, goes out to drink and gamble. Tommy, a smooth operator, hangs out in bars and tries to pick up women but likens his life to "doing time on the outside." Mackenzie films the minutely incremental action (or, more often, inaction) in strikingly textured and composed images (the night photography alone would make the film immortal), balancing them with the character's revealing, poignant voice-over monologues. Few directors in the history of cinema have so skillfully and deeply joined a sense of place with the subtle flux of inner life.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Sept. 24-27.)

THE INFORMANT!

At first, we think that Mark Whitacre (Matt Damon, with a wavy pompadour and steel-rimmed glasses) is the epitome of Midwestern square. In 1992, Whitacre, an executive at the agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland, was part of a price-fixing scheme. Trapped, he begins collaborating with the F.B.I., wearing a wire in meetings with colleagues. He turns into a foolish risk-taker, a kind of electrified dork who imagines himself a hero out of the movies. He gets results, and the Justice Department builds its case. But then, by degrees, everything he says begins to sound false. One lie encases another, and then another. We're shocked, and the director, Steven Soderbergh, moves swiftly and surely through short scenes, keeping the style thoroughly ambiguous—lodged somewhere between thriller and farce. "The Informant!," based on a true story, is a full-scale production with locations all over the globe, yet it's also an aggressively perverse joke. By the end, the movie becomes a minor classic about the unreliability of judgment and the instability of truth. Scott Z. Burns, working freely with Kurt Eichenwald's 2000 book, wrote the screenplay. With Scott Bakula and also such comedians as Joel McHale and Tom Papa, who give their lines slightly ironic inflections—a pause, a smile—that throw the scenes off kilter.—*D.D.* (9/21/09) (In wide release.)

INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS

In Quentin Tarantino's fantastical jest about the Second World War, a group of European film people and an American Army unit of vengeful Jews, the Basterds, led by a Gentile, Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt), separately plot to destroy the Nazi command, which has gathered at a movie theatre in Occupied Paris in 1944. For years, the Americans, operating in Occupied France, have been beating Nazi soldiers to death with baseball bats and carving swastikas in their foreheads. Whether the Basterds are Tarantino's ideal of an all-American killing team or his parody of one is hard to say. Very little in "Basterds" is meant to be taken straight, but the movie isn't quite farce, either. It's lodged in an uneasy nowheresville between counterfactual pop fantasia and trashy exploitation. The picture isn't boring, but it's ridiculous, and stunningly insensitive—a teen-ager's dream of revenge too silly to enjoy, even as a joke. With the talented Christoph Waltz as a super-smart S.S. colonel. The role is a cliché of evil suavity out of old Warner Bros. movies, but Waltz is terrific at it.—*D.D.* (8/24/09) (In wide release.)

JENNIFER'S BODY

Megan Fox is Jennifer, a vixenish cheerleader, and Amanda Seyfried is Anita, called "Needy," her unlikely B.F.F., a style-free nerd who—after an unsolved series of gory murders of local boys—must confront Jennifer's transformation from figurative to literal man-eater. Diablo Cody's insistent script does all the work, setting up a few clever plot twists along with some resonant feminist metaphors, and the small-town milieu of forests and boredom, of single parents on night shifts and grungy amusements, provides an apt setting for demonic doings. Cody gets in some fun digs at the macho vulgarity of low-end indie rock and the sanctimonious rites of school spirit, but the "Juno"-style patter falls flat (though it's good to hear the girls talk dirty like the boys in "Superbad"). Unfortunately, the director, Karyn Kusama, concentrates more on sending messages of feminine empowerment than on conjuring metaphysical moods. The movie flits by blandly, like a genre novel for teens imprinted directly onscreen.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

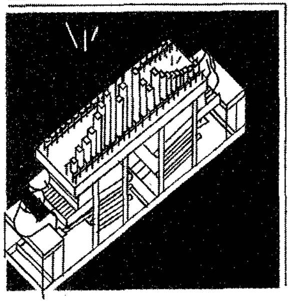
JULIE & JULIA

Meryl Streep as Julia Child, an American in Paris in the fifties, longing to write a cookbook, and Amy

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
CHAOS THEORY

Tauba Auerbach's début at Deitch Projects, in 2006, established the artist as a semiotician with mad visual skills and the audacity (and diligence) to recode the Bible. The twenty-eight-year-old polymath's beautiful new show at the gallery, "Here and Now/And Nowhere," tackles the topic of chaos, leaving language behind in favor of such deceptively simple images as crumpled sheets of paper, creased fabric, and static on a television screen. Color photographs of the latter, while conceptually sexy—some of that static may be almost fourteen billion years old—grow monotonous. But the crumples, depicted in two big black-and-white canvases, pulsate with an Op-art dazzle worthy of Bridget Riley. Six more paintings look like stretched pieces of wrinkled cloth but are, in fact, a virtuosic exercise in trompe-l'oeil and a canny update of Ad Reinhardt's "invisible" monochromes. The show's visual randomness is ordered by its pièce de résistance, "The Auerglass," a two-person pump organ (designed with Cameron Mesirow, of the band Glasser), which looms as a silent sculptural presence until it's played, daily at 5.

—*Andrea K. Scott*



LAURENT CILLUFFO

Adams as Julie Powell, a lost young American wife in Queens in 2002, who replicates Child's recipes. The structure is more a rhyming device than a dramatic idea, yet it works well enough to hold together a dual fable of driving ambition and anxious discipleship. The movie is memorable, of course, for Streep's performance. Like a tall ship at full sail, she leans, tilts, and billows. Odd explosions of air—whoops, exclamations—come hurtling through the passageways. She runs out of breath, and then settles, mysteriously, like an old Bible that italicizes ordinary words, on a single syllable. Nora Ephron, who wrote and directed, is interested in food less as something to cook than as the binding and unifying element in marriage, dinner parties, and friendship. In all, one of the most charming American movies of recent years. With Stanley Tucci and Chris Messina as supportive husbands. Based on books by Child and Powell.—*D.D.* (8/24/09) (In wide release.)

MAUVAIS SANG (BAD BLOOD)

A masterpiece of ecstatic cinema, from 1986, by Leos Carax, a shooting star who was only twenty-five when he made it and has been in free fall ever since—a state of affairs that this self-flagellating, self-revealing melodrama seems to have foretold. The neo-noir plot concerns Marc (Michel Piccoli), an older gangster who pulls Alex (Denis Lavant), the son of his slain cohort, into a plot to break into a laboratory and steal an AIDS-like virus, and finds his mistress, Anna (Juliette Binoche), falling for the younger man. Alex's love life is the motor of the story, which begins with his abandonment of his fair-haired teen-age girlfriend (Julie Delpy) and continues through the eye-popping, breathtaking rhapsody of his newfound romantic obsession with the mysterious dark-haired gamine. Carax sends Alex and Anna airborne in a parachute-jump sequence that is only one of the movie's many anthology pieces (the feral Lavant's wild run through the streets, to the strains of David Bowie's "Modern Love," is another). With an emotional world derived from Godard's early films, a visual vocabulary that pays tribute to his later ones, and a magical sensibility that owes much to Jean Cocteau, Carax—whose real first name is Alexandre—allegorizes the burden of young genius in a world of mighty patriarchs who aren't budging. In French and English.—*R.B.* (BAM; Sept. 24.)

THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN AMERICA: DANIEL ELLSBERG AND THE PENTAGON PAPERS

In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg, the former marine and Defense Department analyst, released to the New York *Times* the top-secret Pentagon Papers, an extended history of America's involvement in Vietnam, which revealed that various Administrations had lied to the public about what they were doing. Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith's documentary chronicles a kind of secular spiritual journey—from warrior to anti-warrior, from analyst to activist, from patriot to "traitor." Ellsberg himself, now in his late seventies, describes the stages of his transformation with his usual precision and ardor, and the filmmakers fill in events with news footage and rather hokey re-creations of Ellsberg's actions (such as a man in shadow speaking into a telephone). The movie gently suggests that, without considerable vanity and a touch of grandiosity, Ellsberg might never have acted as bravely as he did. But how many powerful men today take full responsibility for their actions? Featuring Oval Office tapes of Richard Nixon responding to Ellsberg's acts in his own ineffably vicious and low-minded style.—*D.D.* (Film Forum.)

9

Shane Acker's film begins with an ending: the world reduced to a dead zone of rusted, unpopulated townscapes, as a result of some ancient clash between triumphalist politicians and machines. The machines won. No organic beings remain, just a bestial contraption that stalks the streets, and, crouching in its shadow, a group of toylike creatures, patched together from leftover materials and known only by the numbers on their backs. Against the advice of 1 (voiced by Christopher Plummer), who hides in a ruined church, the dauntless 9 (Elijah Wood), the spunky 7 (Jennifer Connelly), and a handful of others set out to vanquish the mechanical brutes and prepare for the resumption of normal existence. How they achieve this is, to say the least, nebulous: something to do with hidden codes and the mint-green wraiths of their dead companions. But the film is itself given life by the wit and exactitude of the computer animation, which finds real texture and pathos in the fantastic.—*A.L.* (9/14/09) (In wide release.)

THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

As the title suggests, R. J. Cutler's conventional but engaging documentary about the inner workings of *Vogue* has its drama built into it: the race against time to compose and to complete the 2007 edition of the year's keystone issue, as seen from the top. Cutler anchors the film on a portrait of the magazine's editor-in-chief, Anna Wintour, but he wisely builds the action around her fruitful collaboration—and, at times, conflict—with Grace Coddington, *Vogue's* creative director, whose inspired concepts for photo shoots and hands-on stylings furnish the raw material for Wintour's synoptic shaping of the magazine and its place in the world. The regal André Leon Talley, the editor-at-large, provides comic relief, and, though the quick-cutting sprint through the wide-ranging action doesn't dig deep, the behind-the-scenes view of tussles with photographers and designers at least suggests the exacting aestheticism and practical smarts that fashion's fantasies both demand and reflect.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

35 SHOTS OF RUM

The French director Claire Denis's tender tribute to the bond between a father and a daughter brings the moody luminosity of the art house to a story as sentimental and untroubling as a Hallmark special. The drama, such as it is, concerns Lionel (Alex Descas), a widowed conductor on Paris's suburban lines, who shares an apartment in a bland suburban housing complex with his daughter, Joséphine (Mati Diop), a university student who is being courted by their neighbor, Noé (Grégoire Colin). The textures of daily life, the slight variations in the routines of work and leisure, of studies and amusements, are more suggested than conveyed; Denis's gentle, well-meaning conceptions of the working class, including the depictions of France as a multiracial society (Lionel, like most of his colleagues and Joséphine's classmates, is black, his wife was white), are heartwarming, unexceptionable, and as shallow as a campaign poster. Denis and her screenwriter, Jean-Pol Fargeau, make a familiar mistake that has become a convention: they lend working people gravitas by giving them almost nothing to say. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

WALT & EL GRUPO

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In limited release.)

Also Playing

CRUDE: IFC Center. **I CAN DO BAD ALL BY MYSELF:** In wide release. **THE OTHER MAN:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. Sept. 23-24 at 7 and 8:45: "If One Thing Matters: A Film About Wolfgang Tillmans" (2008, Heiko Kalmbach). ♦ Sept. 24-25 at 7:15 and 9 and Sept. 26-27 at 5:30, 7:15, and 9: "The Exiles" (†).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through Sept. 30: "Rendez-vous with Juliette Binoche." Except where noted, all films are in French. Sept. 24 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Mauvais Sang (Bad Blood)" (†). ♦ Sept. 25 at 3, 6, and 9: "Lovers on the Bridge" (1991, Leos Carax). ♦ Sept. 26 at 2 and 6:50: "Caché" (2005, Michael Haneke). ♦ Sept. 26 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Code Unknown" (2000, Haneke). ♦ Sept. 27 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Summer Hours" (2008, Olivier Assayas). ♦ Sept. 28 at 7: "The English Patient" (1996, Anthony Minghella; in English). ♦ Sept. 29 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Mary" (2005, Abel Ferrara; in English).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Sept. 23-Oct. 1 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Fat City" (1972, John Huston).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—Through Oct 6: "(Re)Inventing China: A New Cinema for a New Society, 1949-1966," a New York Film Festival sidebar. All films are in Mandarin. Sept. 26 at 2: "Bridge" (1949, Wang Bin). ♦ Sept. 26 at 4 and Sept. 28 at 4:15: "Platoon Commander Guan" (1951, Shi Hui). ♦ Sept. 26 at 6:20: "Two Stage Sisters" (1965, Xie Jin). ♦ Sept. 26 at 8:45: "Visitors on the Icy Mountains" (1963, Zhao Shinshui). ♦ Sept. 27 at 2: "The Life of a Beijing Policeman" (1950, Shi). ♦ Sept. 27 at 4:20: "Before the New Director Arrives" (1956, Lü Ban). ♦ Sept. 27 at 6: "The Red Detachment of Women" (1961, Xie). ♦ Sept. 27 at 8:30: "Li Shuang Shuang" (1962, Lu Ren). ♦ Sept. 28 at 6:35: "Mysterious Traveling Companion" (1955, Lin Nong and Zhu Wenshun). ♦ Sept. 28 at 8:35: "Family (1957, Chen Xihe and Ye Ming). ♦ Sept. 29 at 4:15: "Woman Basketball Player No. 5 (1957, Xie). ♦ Sept. 29 at 6:15: "New Year Sacrifice" (1956, Sang Hu). ♦ Sept. 29 at 8:20: "Five Golden Flowers" (1959, Wang Jiayi).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Sept. 25-27 at 11 A.M.: "Claire's Knee" (1969, Éric Rohmer; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Sept. 25-26: "The Shining" (1980, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Sept. 22 at 8: "Jane" (1962, D. A. Pennebaker and Richard Leacock).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Sept. 23-25 at 1:30: "Before the Nickelodeon: The Early Cinema of Edwin S. Porter" (1982, Charles Musser), followed by a program of short films by Porter. ♦ "Looking at Music: Side 2." Sept. 23 at 4 and Sept. 28 at 7: "All Dolled Up: A New York Dolls Story" (2005, Bob Gruen and Nadya Beck). ♦ Sept. 26 at 4: "The Blank Generation" (1976, Ivan Kral and Amos Poe). ♦ Sept. 27 at 5: "Taxi Driver" (1976, Martin Scorsese). ♦ "Critical Favorites: The New York Film Critics Circle at 75." Sept. 23 at 4: "Grand Illusion" (Jean Renoir, 1937). ♦ Sept. 23 at 8: "Hannah and Her Sisters" (1986, Woody Allen). ♦ Sept. 24 at 4:30: "In the Heat of the Night" (1967, Norman Jewison). ♦ Sept. 25 at 4:15: "Pixote" (1981, Hector Babenco; in Portuguese). ♦ In première. Sept. 23 at 7 and Sept. 24 at 8: "Harmony and Me" (2009, Bob Byington). ♦ Sept. 24-25 and Sept. 30 at 7, Sept. 26 at 7:30, Sept. 27 at 2:30, and Sept. 28 at 4: "Paradise" (2009, Michael Almereyda). ♦ "Recent Film Acquisitions: Continuum." Sept. 25 at 7: "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring" (2001, Peter Jackson). ♦ Sept. 26 at 2: "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers" (2002, Jackson). ♦ Sept. 26 at 6: "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" (2003, Jackson). ♦ Sept. 27 at 5:30: "Venus" (2006, Roger Michell). ♦ Sept. 28 at 6:30: "Australia" (2008, Baz Luhrmann).

NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL

Starr Theatre, Alice Tully Hall, 1941 Broadway, Lincoln Center (212-671-4050)—Sept. 25 at 6: "Wild Grass" (2009, Alain Resnais; in French). ♦ Sept. 26 at 11 A.M.: "The Wizard of Oz" (1939, Victor Fleming). ♦ Sept. 26 at 2:15: "Sweetgrass" (2009, Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor). ♦ Sept. 26 at 5:30 and Sept. 27 at 9:15: "Eccentricities of a Blond Hair Girl" (†). ♦ Sept. 26 at 8:30 and Sept. 27 at 6: "Vincere" (2009, Marco Bellochio; in Italian). ♦ Sept. 27 at 2:15: "Ghost Town" (2008, Zhao Dayong; in Mandarin). ♦ Sept. 27 at 11:30 A.M. and Sept. 28 at 6: "Kanikosen" (2009, Sabu; in Japanese). ♦ Sept. 28 at 9:15 and Sept. 29 at 6: "Police, Adjective" (2009, Corneliu Porumboiu; in Romanian). ♦ Sept. 29 at 9:15: "The Art of the Steal" (2009, Don Argott).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Sept. 25 at 9:30: "Last Year at Marienbad" (1961, Alain Resnais; in French).

READINGS AND TALKS

HUE-MAN BOOKSTORE & CAFÉ
Elizabeth Nunez reads from her new novel, "Anna In-Between." (2319 Frederick Douglass Blvd., between 124th and 125th Sts. 212-665-7400. Sept. 23 at 6.)

BOOKS OF WONDER
Alastair Reid delves into his recently republished children's book, "Ounce Dice Trice," which first appeared in 1958, a year before he started writing for this magazine. Treats will be provided by the Cupcake Café. (18 W. 18th St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 24 at 6.)

STRAND BOOK STORE
A night of innovative graphic storytelling with R. Sikoryak, who crosses classical literature with classic comics and whose latest book is "Masterpiece Comics," and the famed artist R. O. Blechman, who recently published "Talking Lines," his first collection of illustrated short stories. (Broadway at 12th St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 24 at 7.)

POETRY SOCIETY OF AMERICA
The society celebrates its second annual "Bright Lights Big Verse: Poems of Times Square" competition with a reading by the contest's winners and by the poets Kimiko Hahn, David Lehman, and Paul Muldoon. (Duffy Square, Times Square, Broadway at 47th St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 29 at 6:30.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"FEEL FREE: A NATIONAL PARKS CELEBRATION"
The filmmaker Ken Burns has turned his attention from baseball, jazz, and the Civil War to the nation's parks. His latest work is a six-part series about federally owned public spaces, premièring on Sept. 27 on PBS. This week, he's screening excerpts from the series in Central Park's East Meadow. The musicians Eric Benet, Gavin DeGraw, José Feliciano, Carole King, Peter Yarrow, and Alison Krauss and Union Station featuring Jerry Douglas will perform. (Sept. 23 at 7. For more information, visit www.feelfree.org.)

KITCHEN BLOCK PARTY
Many block parties and street festivals in the city are tacky, disruptive, commercial affairs. This one, however, organized by the long-running arts institution the Kitchen, is promising. Such contemporary artists as Derrick Adams, Nathan Carter, Xavier Cha, Aisha Cousins, and Sara Greenberger Rafferty are creating projects for the affair, and there will also be workshops in hula hooping, drumming, and double Dutch. (W. 19th St., from Tenth to Eleventh Aves. For more information, visit www.thekitchen.org. Sept. 26, from noon to 5.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The big auction houses dip a toe into Impressionist, modern, and contemporary art this week—though the big make-or-break sales don't come until November. **Christie's** starts things off with a friendly auction of moderately priced Impressionist and modern art (Sept. 22), featuring such lots as "Élisabeth à Deauville," a pleasing composition in grays and deep green by Jean-Pierre Cassigneul. On the following day (Sept. 23), the house will try to lure younger collectors at its "First Open" sale of postwar and contemporary art (including works on paper), led by one of Warhol's "Flowers" paintings—a composition of four enormous hibiscus blossoms, two in Day-glo pink and two in orange, from 1964; the auction also includes works by Gerhard Richter, Ed Ruscha, and Yue Minjun. The following week is all about American art and furniture, beginning with a selection of paintings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Sept. 29): lots of landscapes, maritime scenes, and the odd cowboy on the range. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** skips ahead to mid-range contemporary art (Sept. 24) in an auction that features one of Warhol's iconic Campbell's-soup-can paintings (from 1962), as well as the painting "Blue Dogs: A Pair," by George Rodrigue. The house then moves on to two days of wine sales (Sept. 25-26). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Ornamentation, decadence, and excess never go out of fashion at **Doyle**, which will be holding the first of its semiannual "Belle Époque" sales on Sept. 23, offering opulent furniture, porcelain, lamps (lots of Tiffany, of course), clocks, and decorative items of all types. The range of featured styles includes the Louis XV and XVI revivals, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco, none of which were known for their austerity. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.) ♦ **Bloomsbury** offers a whimsical collection of self-portraits on Sept. 24, all quick sketches made at the request of Burt Britton, a longtime manager at the legendary Strand bookstore in the East Village. How did Truffaut see himself? As a balding boy in the mirror. And Brassaï? An elaborate eye, of course. (6 W. 48th St. 212-719-1000.)

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JILLIAN TAMAKI

Rosanne Cash, at St. Ann's Warehouse.

ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
RETURN OF THE MUSE
Oct. 4

In the mid-twentieth century, Suzanne Farrell embodied the musicality, bloom, and daring of American ballet; Balanchine fell under her spell and made countless ballets for her, including "Don Quixote" and "Chaconne." Her D.C.-based company, Suzanne Farrell Ballet, comes to Princeton's McCarter Theatre for a matinée of Balanchine (including a rarely performed piece) and a little Béjart. (609-258-2787.)

NIGHT LIFE
FATHER KNOWS BEST
Oct. 9-10

When Rosanne Cash was eighteen, her father, Johnny, wrote down a hundred songs that he thought his daughter should know. The singer-songwriter's latest album, "The List," draws from her father's picks; she'll be performing from it at St. Ann's Warehouse. (www.stannswarehouse.org)

MOVIES
STELLA!
Oct. 9-29

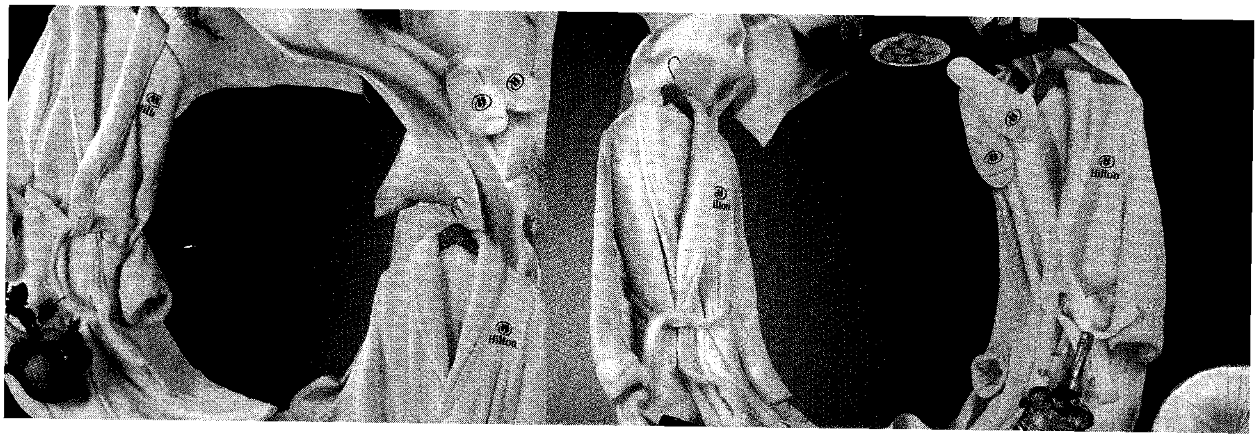
Elia Kazan brought the methods of the Method to the screen. Marlon Brando came to life in "A Streetcar Named Desire" and went further still in "On the Waterfront." James Dean shone in "East of Eden"; Warren Beatty got his start in "Splendor in the Grass." These are among the fourteen features in Film Forum's retrospective. (212-727-8110.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
MAHLER AND MORE
Oct. 21, Oct. 23, and Oct. 25

Those who didn't get enough Mahler at Carnegie Hall's festival last spring can head uptown to Avery Fisher Hall, where the magisterial Bernard Haitink leads the London Symphony Orchestra in "Das Lied von der Erde" and the Fourth and Ninth Symphonies, along with two symphonies by Schubert. (212-721-6500.)

ART
NOVEL APPROACH
Nov. 6-March 14

If you blanch at the idea of "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies," take solace in "A Woman's Wit: Jane Austen's Life and Legacy," at the Morgan Library and Museum, which includes the author's manuscripts, early editions, and letters. (212-685-0008.)



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FOCUS on driving

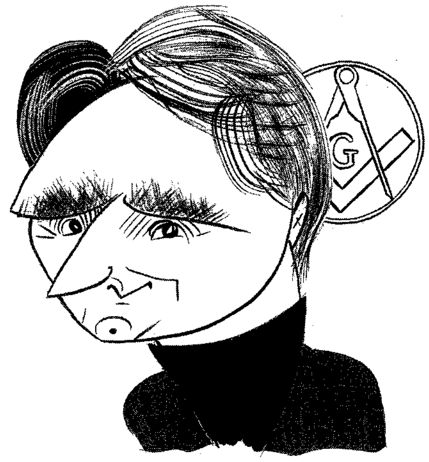
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
READ ALL ABOUT IT

In hard times, we look to the single savior, the knight in shining armor. Or knights: the Beatles, forty years on, have reappeared, walking across the same old London road, to rescue what's left of the record industry. At the same moment, the publishing industry, still afloat but listing, turns to the less charismatic but crafty eye of the writer Dan Brown to sail it back to safety. Brown's long occult-mystery novels, featuring the intrepid Dr. Robert Langdon, a tenured Harvard professor of something called symbology—a field unknown to both Harvard and spell-check (try it)—are the welcome if improbable million-and-beyond best-sellers of our time, with the latest episode, "The Lost Symbol," now upon us. The new book is, as every speed-reading reviewer has noted, the same package as before—the wise if wooden professor, the cagey babe-scientist, the oft-naked assassin, and the ancient conspiracy newly brought to life in familiar tourist destinations, this time in Washington, D.C., rather than Paris, and turning on elusive Masonic mystics, rather than secretive Merovingian dynasts. But what, exactly, is inside the package? What spell does it cast and how does it cast it? Books are not so widely read without a reason. Surely future historians will look to Brown as an index of What We Were Really Thinking, and, turning the dense and loaded pages of his books, they may well ask, This they read for *fun*?

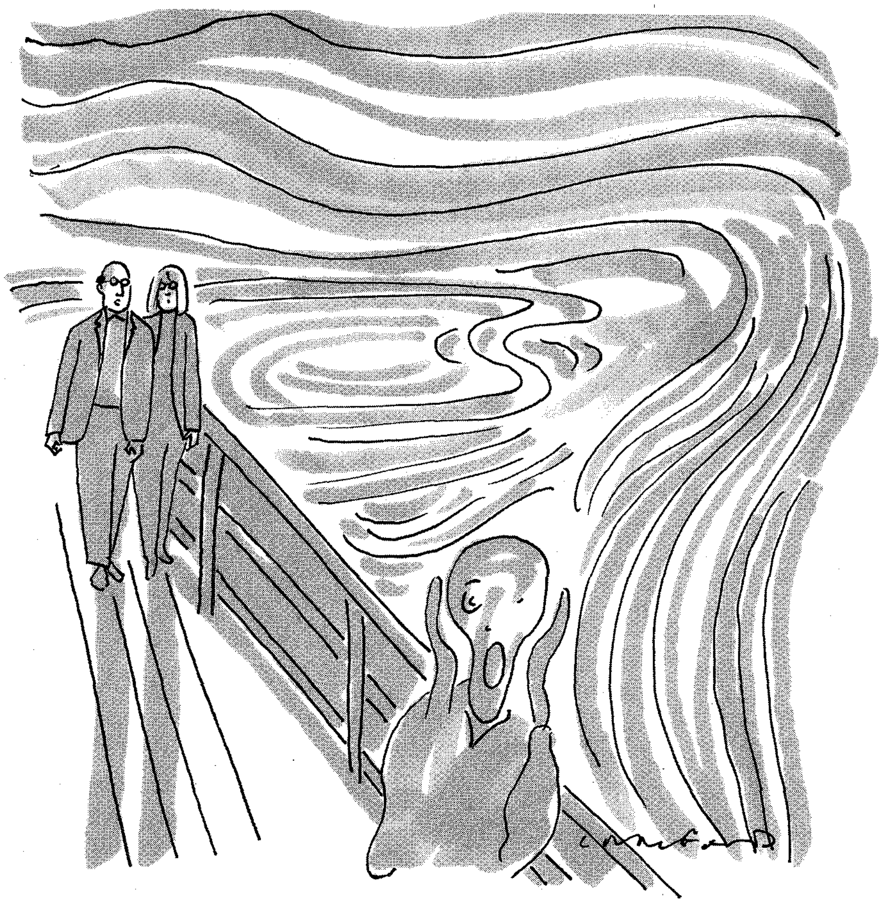
It's easy to pastiche Brown's prose, with its infectious italics ("*What the hell is going on?!*") and its action-prodding, single-sentence paragraphs. ("Langdon stared in horror.") The clichés line up outside the dust jacket and are whisked in pairs to a table down front: "In the heat of the moment, Capitol police officer Nuñez had seen no option but to help the Capitol Architect and Robert Langdon escape. Now, however, back in the basement police headquarters, Nuñez could see the storm clouds gathering fast." Add Brown's habit of inventing where no invention is needed—there are no departments of "symbology," but there are departments of semiotics, where Langdon would fit right in—and you have a surface less commercially calculated than genuinely eccentric.



And well meaning. "The Lost Symbol"—with all its ritual murders and fearsome amputations and "My God!"s around every margin—is an amazingly *nice* book. The text regularly lurches to a stop, with the generosity of a third-grade teacher on a class museum outing, offering bits of research and history. Much of it is bogus, to be sure—though modern Masonry borrowed some oogah-boogah from the Egyptian past, it was an Enlightenment club, whose greatest product was "The Magic Flute," and which was about as sinister, and secretly controlled about as many governments, as the Royal Order of Raccoons in "The Honeymooners." But Brown is having fun. And the book is full of activities; there's more to do with a pencil and safety scissors than in any *Highlights for Children*. At a crucial moment in the story, we even have a magic square, one of those puzzles, beloved of twelve-year-old boys, in which every row and column adds up to the same number. (The mysteries themselves, however, are not very mysterious: if you can't figure out what the tall, thin, pyramid-capped, Masonic-looking monument in Washington to which this story is strangely tending might be, then you are slower on the uptake than most, though swifter than Langdon.)

The connection to the twelve-year-old boy might be the key. Brown's writing resembles less the adult best-sellers of the past, which popularized high lit-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



"He does have a point."

erary forms—"Gone with the Wind" was a kind of kitsch Tolstoy—than the adventure stories that were once the staple of adolescent literature. Tom Swift and the Hardy Boys were always in the midst of compelling conspiracies; there was always a code that had to be cracked, and ancient Asian priests and ancient Asian cults invading their cozy American worlds.

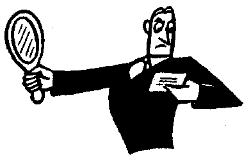
And that may be the secret of Brown's appeal: his books are as sweet-tempered as they are secret-minded. Langdon exposes horrible conspiracies, but it turns out that, with the exception of a few homicidal hotheads, who have maybe let the thing run away with them, decent, well-intended guys run even the weirdest cabals. Brown's repeated point is not that we are mired in ancient conspiracies but that ancient conspiracies anticipate modern opinions. What is "coded" in "The Da Vinci Code" is that the ancient Christians were modern feminists; Jesus was a loving husband who deferred to the wisdom of his wife, Mary Magdalene, the Hillary Clinton of Galilee. When we come to the end of this new book, we discover that what the Masons were really practicing was a neat kind of cognitive science. The old codes of the pyramid are merely the newest discoveries of psychology, a thought that turns the text once again toward italics: "'The Bible, like many ancient texts, is a detailed exposition of the most sophisticated machine ever created. . . *the human mind*.' She sighed."

Conspiracies invoked in a mode essentially cheerful, the occult revealed to be engagingly open-minded: Brown's secret turns out to be the same as Oprah's beloved "Secret"—you can have it all. Ancient myth and modern science, weird conspiracies and a job at Harvard—not to mention the affection of the heroine. This is the new conspiratorial normal.

The trouble comes not only when you recall real history but when you look around: the conspiracy theories out there today—the ones about the socialist fascists who are coming to get you at the behest of the alien President—are not cute. The old ones weren't, either. Real anti-Masonic paranoia was a bad business, intertwined with the ugliest politics in European history. Fear and hatred underlie conspiracy theories; they always have. You can draw them away from reality, but you can't really drain them of rage. There's maybe something worrying about so many millions of readers entertaining a paranoia on the page that was, in its time, as crazy as the paranoia in the country today. As that twelve-year-old's mom used to say, it's all a lot of fun until somebody cries.

—*Adam Gopnik*

THE BLOTTER
BLAGO SPEAKS. AGAIN.



The American political memoir comes in many forms—the magisterial catalogue of heroic achievement, the backward glance at modest beginnings—but none of these sub-genres have thrived with more repetition and variation than the cri de coeur of the indicted-but-not-yet-convicted office-holding grandee. For febrile self-defensiveness and look-over-there deflections and deceptions, Rod Blagojevich's new book, "The Governor: Finally, the Truth Behind the Political Scandal That Continues to Rock the Nation," is surely unsurpassed.

The tone is grave. "Think about it," Blagojevich writes. "I'm the governor of a big state. And I have a situation where if, hypothetically, my father-in-law wants me to hire Chucky Lomanto's cousin and I don't, my father-in-law will run to my mother-in-law, tell her all about it and convince her I was a big ingrate who wasn't helping him." It is unclear that Henry Adams could have put it any better.

Blagojevich has been in and out of Manhattan since his pre-dawn arrest, last winter, peddling the line that he comes from a mythological realm in which Lake Michigan, like Avernus, is an infernal and troubled water, and a god named Barack has, like Zeus, ascended Olympus, while he, like Icarus, "flew too effing close to the sun." And yet no sun can melt Blago's coif, which, despite his many troubles, descends like a silken espresso curtain and then swerves suddenly to the side, revealing a gaze most innocent.

On a recent Sunday evening, Blagojevich, tailed by his P.R. man and "crisis manager," swept across the Hilton lobby unnoticed by visitors crowded around televisions playing the Giants game. "People seem to like me here," he said as he settled into a secluded corner of the hotel bar. "No 'F you!' or 'Yo, F off!' like you get some places. Maybe I should be a New Yorker."

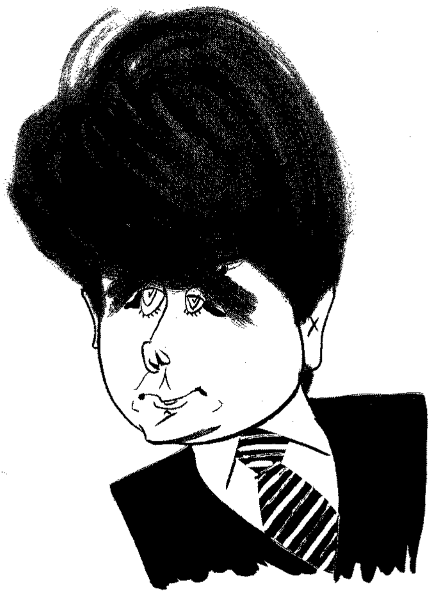
Next year, a judge and a jury of his peers will deliberate over the oral-history-by-wiretap that captured Blagojevich's self-aggrandizing ambitions and resulted in a dizzying multiple-count corruption indictment that features extortion, pocketing money through his wife's "real-estate job," a plot involving the withholding of money from a children's hospital (nice!), trying to sell Barack Obama's Senate seat as if it were a used Barcalounger on eBay, and, generally, running the state of Illinois as if its assets were his feudal preserve, an encompassing realm of criminal possibilities that the prosecutors have labelled "the Blagojevich Enterprise."

As Blagojevich awaits his court date, he has, he said, run aground financially. He has tried to make money by writing his memoir ("All by myself. I went through six boxes of crayons"), singing Elvis Presley's "Treat Me Nice" for a couple of hundred people at a video production company, and trying to land a spot on the NBC reality show "I'm a Celebrity . . . Get Me Out of Here." (His wife got the part.) Blagojevich said that he considered an offer from "Keeping Up with the Kardashians," but that the show did not meet his ethical smell test. "That's in your home," he said. "It's so personal."

If you have never heard the wiretaps (which sound like Lenny Bruce imitating Don Corleone), Blagojevich's book makes a kind of loopy sense. It's not that he really wanted to sell Obama's Senate seat, exactly, oh, no, he just wanted to get something out of it, see—maybe by "holding my nose" and offering it to a useful enemy. For the good of the people of Illinois and whatnot. It is a wonder that "Chucky Lomanto's cousin" plays such a minor role in the text. One thing is certain: Blagojevich feels "hurt," he said, when, occasionally, he is persecuted by an unfeeling public.

"Just the other day in the airport, Friday night, some woman walks by and says 'rotten politician,' " he said, scanning the bar for gawkers. "Then she comes over and takes my picture. I walked up and I said, 'Feel free to steal my image without permission, go ahead, but I want you to know that I didn't do anything wrong.' And she said, 'Oh yeah, and I believe in leprechauns.' "

Blagojevich said that after he is vindicated he is "not ruling myself out or writing myself off as getting back in the business of serving the public." In this vein, he compared his chances to those of Churchill and of Richard Nixon, one of his models. "I believe in those comebacks," he said. Like Nixon, he said, he was placing his faith in "middle America, the Main Street who knows what it's like to be screwed by the liberal media."

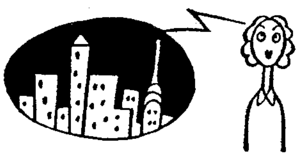


Rod Blagojevich

After Blago said his goodbyes and started to walk off with his crisis manager to another appointment, the light bulb went off and he turned on his heel. "One more thing," he said. "When I say 'comeback,' I'm not necessarily saying I'm going to run for President. You understand that, right?"

—*David Remnick*

THE BOARDS
STOMPING GROUNDS



A long time ago, in a galaxy called midtown, Paul Simon took Carrie Fisher on a date to Studio 54. "We had met in L.A.," Fisher recalled recently. "Paul was with Shelley Duvall, and I was with the producer of 'Star Wars,' a Quaker named Gary Kurtz. I really missed out on *that* action." Not long after that first meeting, they ran into each other again at "Saturday Night Live" and wound up on the dance floor at Studio 54. In 1983, they were married. "I just remember seeing him dance, and knowing later that it was a rare occurrence," Fisher said. The marriage didn't last, and neither did Studio 54: it closed in 1986 and later reopened as a Broadway theatre, where Fisher is about to start previews of her one-woman show, "Wishful Drinking."

It was noon on a Tuesday, and some producers were giving Fisher a tour of the theatre. She had not set foot there since it was a disco. "My mind is just *cheese*," she announced, entering the lobby. (In the show, Fisher recounts, among other things, her experiences with electroconvulsive therapy, which has stabilized her bipolar disorder but leaves her occasionally disoriented.) She wore a black pashmina, sparkly eyeshadow, and red sandals. Inside the theatre, she stood by a row of seats and peered into the balcony. "That was where everyone went to do drugs and have sex," she said. "That's what I heard, anyway. I didn't do that! Drugs, yes."

The show, like the life it chronicles, covers a lot of ground: being the daughter of Debbie Reynolds (age two: her father leaves her mother for Elizabeth Taylor), romantic travails (age thirty-six: the talent agent Bryan Lourd leaves her for another man), the Princess Leia years, rehab, mental illness ("I'm very sane about my insanity," she often says). When the Roundabout offered her the chance to play Studio 54, Fisher embraced the irony. "I'm only going to play theatres where I've been really high," she said.

The producers led Fisher down a stairway and into a drab backstage area. "This is usually our musicians' room. It's storage right now," Sydney Beers, the company's general manager, said. It triggered a Studio 54 flashback.

"I was here all by myself—that was the feeling, anyway—and it was Truman Capote, Andy Warhol, Liza Minnelli: that set," Fisher said. This was pre-Simon, when she was twenty. "I just remember being—what do they call that?—a *wallflower!*"

She sat on a chair and lit a cigarette. Her first time living in New York, she was fifteen, a chorus girl in her mother's production of "Irene." "I was forced into it," she recalled. "It's the way of our family. My rebellion wasn't drugs—it was *not* doing night-club work." Now that she's on Broadway, her mother is feeling vindicated. "She thinks of this as my night-club act. She's always telling me"—here she broke into a perfect impersonation—"'No, *this* is what you wear! You don't listen to me!' 'I always use Chloraseptic right before I go out!'"

Fisher continues to get shock therapy. "It's fantastic," she said, adding that she wasn't worried that the treatment could make her forget her lines: "I forget words like 'gondola.' That's O.K., right? How many times are you going to use that one?"

The group went through a dark hallway and emerged into a gold-painted lounge with seventies-style furniture. "This is our V.I.P. room," Beers said.

"This is nice!" Fisher said. She sat on a gold couch and looked around.

"Part of my gestalt is that I still feel a little bit like a wallflower," she said. "Even in my own life. I talk about myself behind my back."

—*Michael Schulman*

INK

NADER'S BLUEPRINT

For nearly half a decade, Ralph Nader—lawyer, consumer advocate, winner of five-tenths-and-six-hundredths of one per cent of the popular vote in 2008—has been secretly working on his first novel, writing drafts and making edits on multiple Underwood Standard typewriters. Nader does not feel comfortable referring to the book as a novel, even though everything in it is made up. He says that the work belongs to a new genre, one that he calls "a practical utopia," and defines as "a fictional vision that could become a new reality." The book, called "Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us!," is seven hundred and thirty-six pages long, and it contains dozens of characters, many of them real people—Warren Buffett, Barry Diller, and Ted Turner, among others—who act out Nader's political fantasies. By the last page, most of the reforms that Nader has been arguing for all these years end up being enacted. Corporations are neutered. Third parties win. America is reborn.

A few weeks ago, Nader was working the phones in Washington, trying to reach the people he had fictionalized. "I feel that if I am going to do that to people, I want to give them all a heads up," he said. "It's been done to me, you know." In the novel "Still Life with Woodpecker," by Tom Robbins, published in 1980, Nader appears as the romantic obsession of a mythical princess ("She fell quickly asleep and dreamt of Ralph Nader"). Five years later, the science-fiction writer Greg Bear wrote "Eon," which portrays Nader as "a saintly figure, a hero in a wasteland," whose followers win landslide elections in North America and Western Europe (in 2011) and bring down the Soviet Union (in 2012). "You see, *that's* science-fiction utopia," Nader said. "Nobody can give that any credibility."

Nader had reached about half of his characters. "A lot of them are hard to get," he said. "Barry Diller is in Asia." One billionaire was "a little snippy," he said. Others were more amenable. Ted Turner sent a thank-you note. Phil Donahue, a lifelong admirer, was flattered. Yoko Ono, who in the book invents a logo called Seventh-Generation Eye that causes millions of people suddenly to shed their political apathy, sent Nader a brief reply. ("I think it is so sweet of you to write a book about somebody who resembles me. I don't mind at all, of course. Does she look like a tiny dragon?") Warren Beatty, whom Nader envisions running for governor against Arnold Schwarzenegger, and winning, with sixty-three per cent of the vote, blurbed the book. Nader, he wrote, was showing the world "how good he thinks things could be."

Leonard Riggio, the chairman of Barnes & Noble, who is portrayed as an anti-corporate activist, funding protests across the country, was stumped. "I read a bit of it, and I said, 'My God, what is this?' " he said. Robert Price, the son of Sol Price, a founder of Price Club, skimmed the sections of the book in which his father promotes industrial hemp and launches an attack on Wal-Mart that forces the company to unionize. "None of this connects at all," he said.

A delicate call went to Grover Norquist, the president of Americans for Tax Reform. Nader and Norquist are the political equivalent of matter and anti-matter—Nader's career has been devoted to strengthening government, Norquist's to eviscerating it—but the two maintain a friendly rivalry. "I like Ralph, and I have warm fuzzies for him on a number of levels," Norquist said, recalling how he once invited Nader to one of his Wednesday strategy sessions. ("He was clearly traumatized," he added.) In the book, Nader refers to those sessions as gatherings for the "greed and power brigades," and fashions Norquist as the book's principal villain, a conservative evil genius named Brovar Dortwist, who is defeated by a torrent of progressive campaigns, including a TV ad featuring a squawking parrot.

Norquist had not yet read the book. "He told me that I wouldn't be too unhappy, because the character was principled," Norquist said. He seemed to relish the role that Nader had given him in utopia. "I am all in favor of having the left win in fiction," he said, but he wondered about the odd pseudonym. ("Brovar?" he asked. "Is that even a real name?") As Norquist learned more about the details of his character, one could sense another budding novelist emerging. Brovar Dortwist owns a Doberman named Get'Em, and Norquist said, "I don't like dogs. He should have checked. I used to have a six-foot-long red-tailed boa constrictor named Lysander Spooner—after the great nineteenth-century anarchist. We had him for most of the nineties, until my staff decided that he was large enough to eat a child."

—*Raffi Khatchadourian*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

RATINGS DOWNGRADE

When Barack Obama went to Wall Street last week to make the case for meaningful financial regulation, he took well-deserved shots at some of the villains of the financial crisis: greedy bankers, reckless investors, and captive regulators. But to that list he could have added credit-rating agencies like Standard & Poor's and Moody's. By giving dubious mortgage-backed securities top ratings, and by dramatically underestimating the risk of default and foreclosure, the agencies played a key role in inflating the housing bubble. If we're going to reform the system, fixing them should be high on the list.

Unfortunately, that's not an easy task, since over the years the government has made the agencies an increasingly important part of the financial system. Rating agencies have been around for a century, and their ratings have been used by regulators since the thirties. But in the seventies the S.E.C. dubbed the three biggest agencies—S.&P., Moody's, and Fitch—Nationally Recognized Statistical Rating Organizations, effectively making them official arbiters of financial soundness. The decision had a certain logic: it was supposed to make it easier for investors to know that the money in their pension or money-market funds was going into safe and secure investments. But the new regulations also turned the agencies from opinion-givers into indispensable gatekeepers. If you want to sell a corporate bond, or package a bunch of mortgages together into a security, you pretty much need a rating from one of the agencies. And though the agencies are private companies, their opinions can effectively have the force of law. The ratings often dictate what institutions like banks, insurance companies, and money-market funds can and can't do: money-market funds can't have more than five per cent of their assets in low-rated commercial paper, there are limits on the percentage of non-investment-grade assets that banks can own, and so on.

The conventional explanation of what's wrong with the rating agencies focusses on the fact that most of them are paid by the very people whose financial products they rate. That problem needs to be fixed, and last week the S.E.C. proposed new rules to address conflicts of interest. But there's a much bigger problem, which is that, even though nearly everyone knows that the agencies are compromised and exert too much influence, the system makes it impossible not to rely on them. In theory, of course, the mere fact that a rating agency says a particular bond is AAA (close to risk-free) doesn't mean that investors have to buy it; the agencies' opinions should be just one ingredient in any decision. In practice, the government's seal of approval, coupled with those regulatory requirements, encourages investors to put far too much weight on the ratings. According to a recent paper on the subject by the academics Darren Kisgen and Philip Strahan, that's true even when the agency doing the rating doesn't have a long track record. During the housing bubble, investors put a huge amount of money into AAA-rated mortgage-backed securities—which would have been fine had the rating agencies' judgments been sound. Needless to say, they weren't. Despite subprime borrowers' notoriously shaky finances, the agencies failed to allow for the possibility that housing prices might fall sharply.

The rating agencies' role in inflating the bubble is well known. Less obvious is their role in accelerating the crash. Agencies have typically resisted changing their ratings on a frequent basis, so changes, when they occur, tend to be belated, widespread, and big. In the space of just a few months between late 2007 and mid-2008 (after the housing bubble burst), the agencies collectively downgraded an astonishing $1.9 trillion in mortgage-backed securities: some securities that had carried a AAA rating one day were downgraded to CCC the next. Because many institutional investors are prohibited from owning too many low-rated securities, these downgrades necessarily led to forced selling, magnifying the panic, and prevented other investors from swooping in and buying the distressed debt cheaply. In effect, the current system pushes many big investors to buy high and sell low.

Rating agencies existed long before they carried a government imprimatur, and, their recent dismal performance notwithstanding, they'll exist in the future, if only because few investors have the patience to sort through all the bond offerings and structured-finance deals out there. But we need a divorce: the rating agencies shouldn't be government-sanctioned and government-protected institutions and their judgments shouldn't be part of the rules that govern how investors can act.

Given how rarely real reform happens in Washington, that may sound like a hopeless goal. But last summer the S.E.C. seriously considered enacting a series of proposals that would have gone some way toward uncoupling the rating agencies from the regulatory system. The plan fizzled, however, thanks in part to pressure from a surprising source: big investors. Oddly, the ratings system, broken as it is, remains attractive to many investors who have been burned by it. For one thing, it provides an easily comprehensible standard: without it, we'd need to come up with new ways of measuring risk. More insidiously, the ratings system provides a ready-made excuse for failure: as long as you're buying AAA-rated assets, you can say you're being responsible. After the housing crash, though, we know how illusory those AAA ratings can be. It's time for investors to face reality: working with a fake safety net is more dangerous than working without any net at all.

—*James Surowiecki*

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The Balance Sheet, James Surowiecki's blog.

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POPULAR CHRONICLES

THE IT BIRD

The return of the back-yard chicken.

BY SUSAN ORLEAN

If I had never seen Janet Bonney reënact the mouth-to-beak resuscitation of her hen Number Seven, who had been frozen solid in a nor'easter, then was thawed and nursed back to life—being hand-fed and massaged as she watched doctor shows on TV—I might never have become a chicken person. But a few years ago I happened to watch a documentary called "The Natural History of the Chicken," which opens with the story of Bonney and Number Seven, and for the first time the thought of owning chickens entered my mind. I had watched the film with no preëxisting chicken condition. But seeing Number Seven's resurrection, followed by beauty shots of exotic hens, and segments about small back-yard flocks, I suddenly found myself wanting chickens, and wanting them with an urgency that exceeded even my mad adolescent desire to have a pony. At first, I thought this chicken fixation was a phase that I alone was going through, but it turns out that right now, across the country and beyond, there is a surging passion for raising the birds. Chickens seem to be a perfect convergence of the economic, environmental, gastronomic, and emotional matters of the moment, plus, in the past few years, they have undergone an image rehabilitation so astonishing that it should be studied by marketing consultants. Now that I actually have chickens—seven, at last count, but that number, because of predators, is disturbingly variable—I am the object of more pure envy than I have ever experienced in my life.

On a Venn diagram plotting the interest in chicken ownership and circumstance related to age, gender, acreage, appetite, and aesthetic tolerance, I would land in that pitch-dark center where all the sets overlap. Even now, two years into my chicken stewardship, this is a big surprise to me. I am an animal fancier, but fur-bearing has always been my type: I had never wanted a bird. When I left Manhattan a few years ago and moved a hundred miles north to a house with land and animal-friendly zoning, the first creature I planned on getting was a horse, later downgraded to a donkey. I did fleetingly consider a duck, because I had seen some at my neighbor's house and thought they were darling. But we didn't have a pond, and the idea of getting ducks and then having their water source be a plastic kiddie pool from Toys "R" Us seemed to undermine the rusticity of the experience.

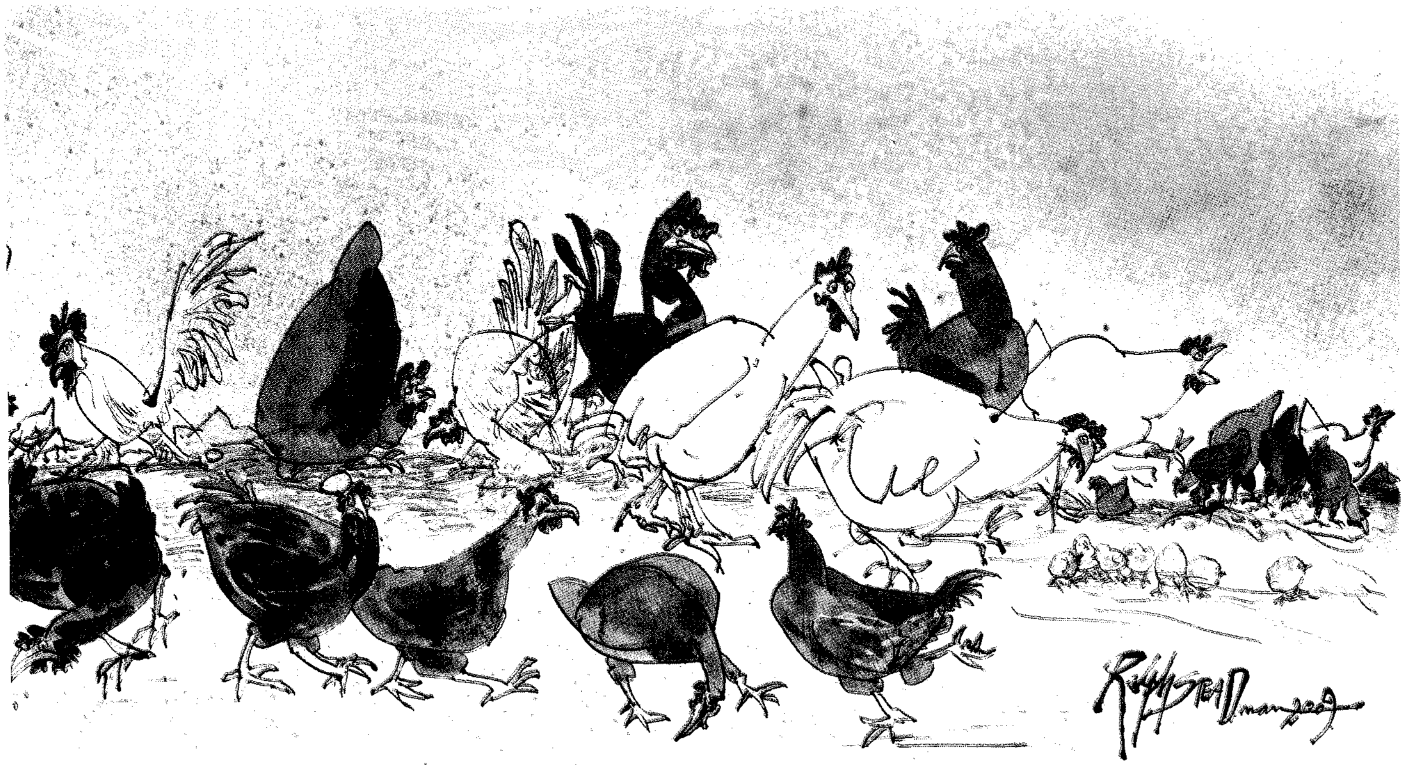
By the time I saw "The Natural History of the Chicken," however, something had been stirring in the poultry world for a while. In 1982, Martha Stewart published her first book, "Entertaining," which featured her flock of rare-breed chickens and their pretty pastel-colored eggs. The photographs of Stewart with the flock were a revelation. For the previous forty years or so, chicken

RALPH STEADMAN

farming had been viewed as a lowly profession, stuck in the netherworld between the high-stakes cattle business and the matter-of-fact farming of crops, and factory-raised chickens seemed to be the worst of both—they were almost more plant than animal, but animal-messy and smelly and sentient. No glamour attached itself to chickens. Stewart's book went on to sell hundreds of thousands of copies. Its readers were probably more interested in how to make her Crab Apple Rosemary Jelly or, for that matter, her Curried Walnut Chicken than in raising a flock of their own Araucanas and Buff Cochins, but they couldn't have helped noting Stewart's endorsement of chicken-keeping. Within the next few years, Stewart launched her magazine, and often featured her chickens in Ford-model-style head shots that made them look ennobled; she also introduced her first paint collection, which was based on egg colors from her flock. She made chickens seem less like livestock and more like useful and companionable creatures. "All of my chickens had names, all of them," she said recently. "I knew all of them. I worried about them. I was really unhappy when anything happened to them. For instance, I was unhappy when my Egyptian Fayoumi hen froze to death." She sighed and then added, "It was awful. I'll never get another Egyptian Fayoumi again."

Not long ago, I was in the waiting room of my veterinarian's office with one of my chickens, who was ailing. A red-faced man with a lame poodle was sitting next to me. I had my chicken in a cat carrier, and when the man leaned over to peek at her I could tell by the look on his face that he had expected to see a mewling kitten. He plopped back in his chair and said to me, "Chickens are the new hot pet, I guess." Well, yes and no. Until the nineteen-fifties, it was common to keep a few chickens around. They were cheap and easy to raise; unlike cows or sheep, they were hardy and tolerant of most weather, could subsist on table scraps and bugs, took up little space, required the simplest of housing, and fertilized the garden while they scratched through it. Gathering eggs was so easy that children were often assigned to do it; by contrast, getting milk or meat or wool was a major production. A chicken was a good investment. A hundred years ago, a chick cost about fifteen cents and a laying hen a few dollars. A hen in her prime, which lasts two or three years, could produce an egg every day or two in the laying season, and once she stopped laying she could be cooked. Buying eggs year-round at a supermarket is a relatively recent development. Commercial incubators, allowing for large-scale chicken enterprise, weren't invented until the late eighteen-hundreds, and they weren't used widely for decades. Even then, egg production was slow. Until the nineteen-thirties, when the Department of Agriculture launched its "poultry-improvement plan" to breed healthier, more productive hens—and the subsequent development of factory farms—eggs were still available only seasonally, like shad roe, and many people kept their own chickens.

Part of what is unusual about chickens is that they have always been women's livestock: women and chickens just seem to have a natural harmony. The covers of early chicken magazines, such as *Everybodys Poultry Magazine*, *Poultry Success*, and *Farm Journal and Farmer's Wife*, featured women and children on sun-kissed farms with hens and chicks at their feet. A book published in 1919, "A Little Journey Among Anconas," which extolls the Ancona breed, features a photograph of a lovely young woman in a crisp summer dress, gazing adoringly at a black chicken perched on her right hand. Small and manageable, chickens were just an extension of a kitchen garden, and women often sold extra eggs to make some money of their own. In an 1893 book called "What Can a Woman Do," a guide for women looking for income, the suggested



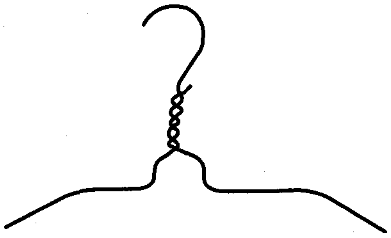
professions include lady journalist, dentist, poet, and hen-keeper. Beekeeping and gardening are the only other agricultural jobs on the list. The author, Martha Louise Rayne, announces that there is "MONEY IN EGGS," and she recounts the story of two "tempest-tossed and homeless women" who set up a poultry farm together and enjoy great success—that is, until one of them decides to marry a male biped, forsaking her hens and her poultry partner. Nevertheless, Rayne recommends that even married women keep chickens, because it can be done without interfering with domestic duties.

The usual barnyard chicken in the early nineteenth century had a red comb, glossy feathers, and dinosaurlike legs—sleek and nice-looking but unremarkable. Then, in the eighteen-forties, a breed of Chinese chicken was introduced to North America and Great Britain. The fattest and fluffiest of these birds were interbred to create a fancy type, a Cochin, that had the approximate shape and texture of a powder puff. The world was agog. A frenzy of poultry breeding and showing and speculative trading began, a crazed bubble nearly on the scale of Dutch tulip mania or Victorian orchidelirium. Prices reached absurd levels—in one instance, a pair of Cochins were valued at seven hundred dollars, about ten thousand per cent more than chickens usually cost. Everyone, from Queen Victoria to members of Congress and aspiring gentry, wanted an extraordinary chicken, especially once the birds were alleged to have remarkable qualities, including exceptional intelligence, and eggs weighing a pound apiece. Interestingly, "hen fever," as it was called, seemed to affect men more than women. *The Century Magazine* reported on it in 1898, explaining that a "hen-man" lost all interest in life except for his chickens: he "may have been an ardent admirer of Shakespeare . . . but now he reads to himself 'Farm Poultry' or 'The Care of Hens.' "

Eventually, crooks and swindlers and even P. T. Barnum infiltrated the trade. (In some cases, dealers were gluing feathers onto ordinary birds to make them look like Cochins.) Soon it became clear that the imagined profits in rare-chicken trading were entirely imaginary; chicken trendsetters like Prince Albert began to tire of the hobby; and then the chickens, collected in too large numbers into too small houses, began to die. Hen fever cooled; men resumed their reading of Shakespeare, and chickens returned to their previous status as sturdy, steady farmworkers.

They were such a fixture in most households that, even as Americans drifted from the country to the cities, they took their chickens with them. Very few cities specifically outlawed chickens until many decades later. You couldn't bring the family cow along when you moved to town, but anyone with a patch of grass could have a chicken or two. But inexpensive supermarket eggs became readily available in the fifties, at approximately the same time as the enchantment with a hygienic, suburbanized life took hold. Can you picture the ambitious young couples of Westchester in the fifties wanting chickens pecking around the flagstone patio and the swing set? What felt modern was to leave the farm behind. In fact, many philosophers, such as John Berger, argue that modernity can be traced, in part, to the moment when we no longer relied on animals for utility, and they were withdrawn from daily life except as ornaments. Then eggs themselves became suspect: in 1964, Konrad Bloch and Feodor Lynen were awarded a Nobel Prize for their research on cholesterol, which conjured images of hardened arteries and vascular lesions, and the assault on eggs, with their cholesterol-rich yolks, began. In an effort to counteract all these things, the American Egg Board launched its "Incredible Edible Egg" campaign in 1976, but the cumulative effect of the bad news meant that casual chicken-keeping seemed doomed.

When I first determined that I had to have chickens, I had trouble figuring out how to go about it. Living in the country, I saw plenty of chickens on working farms, so I occasionally asked the owners if they would be willing to sell me a couple of hens, but no one was interested in parting with any; a mature hen who is a good egg layer is too useful to give up. In the spring, my local feed store set up a tower of little cages filled with tiny peeping chicks, still cottony and clumsy, but you were required to buy at least a six-pack of them, and the prospect of heat lamps and high chick mortality rates made me uneasy. More worrisome was the fact that unless you are a professional chicken-sexer (a critical job in the poultry industry) it is nearly impossible to tell the sex of a baby chick, so your six-pack might turn out to be six roosters. Fine if you like deluxe feathers, but not much use if you hope for eggs.



My chicken thing was not, initially, an egg thing. Having never had a really fresh egg, I didn't find much fault with what I got at ShopRite, and for years I hardly ate any eggs, keeping my cholesterol in mind. But, by the time I started thinking about chickens, eggs had been exonerated. A widely reviewed 2001 study by researchers at Kansas State University established that, because the human body doesn't absorb a substantial amount of the cholesterol in egg yolks, eating an egg or two a day is fine. (Egg whites are completely innocent.) Popular high-protein diets such as the Atkins promoted the omelette as an almost perfect meal. By 2007, the American Egg Board felt confident enough to relaunch the Incredible Edible Egg campaign, supported by a number of health professionals called Egg Ambassadors. In addition, the concept of the hundred-mile diet—that is, eating food that is not only organic but is grown or raised within a hundred miles of your home—had gained traction; the term "locavore" was popularized the same year. What could be more local than your back yard? It was a fine thing to grow your own lettuce and tomatoes and make salad, but raising chickens meant that you could make a main dish with ingredients kept right outside your door. For the squeamish, it had the added appeal of being a main dish that didn't involve killing anything. If you were trying to design a product that satisfied the social preoccupations of the moment, you couldn't have done better than to come up with a hen.

I didn't yet realize that there was a chicken movement under way. I had yet to stumble on the dozens of online chicken groups and Web sites—such as Chickens 101, Housechicken, Cotton-Pickin Chickens, Yardpoultry, and My

FATHERS AND SONS

Some things, they say,
one should not write about. I tried
to help my father comprehend
the toilet, how one needs
to undo one's belt, to slide
one's trousers down and sit,
but he stubbornly stood
and would not bend his knees.
I tried again
to bend him toward the seat,

and then I laughed
at the absurdity. Fathers and sons.
How he had wiped my bottom
half a century ago, and how
I would repay the favor
if he would only sit.

Don't you—
he gripped me, trembling, searching for my eyes.
Don't you—but the word
was lost to him. Somewhere
a man of dignity would not be laughed at.
He could not see
it was the crazy dance
that made me laugh,
trying to make him sit
when he wanted to stand.

—*David Mason*

Pet Chicken—and I was not yet one of the forty thousand members of the BackyardChickens.com forums, and I was not one of the fifteen thousand people who log on each month to watch the writer Terry Golson's "hencam," which Webcasts live from her back-yard coop near Boston, and I had not yet bought Christine Heinrichs's 2007 book, "How to Raise Chickens," a plainspoken guide for people who might not ever have seen a live chicken, which keeps selling more and more copies.

But I did notice that every time I mentioned to my friends that I wanted chickens they all exclaimed that they wanted them, too. It was a species-specific response: when I added that my husband wanted Scottish Highland cattle, those same people were taken aback and inevitably said, "That's weird. How come?" Chicken-keeping seemed slightly less as if we'd tipped over the edge of sanity and were throwing ourselves recklessly, "Green Acres" style, into livestock. Rather, chickens seemed to go hand-in-glove with the post-feminist reclamation of other farmwife domestic arts—knitting, canning, quilting. It was a do-it-yourself hobby at a moment when doing things yourself was newly appreciated as a declaration of self-sufficiency, a celebration of handwork, and a push-back from a numbing and disconnected big-box life.

I started shopping for a chicken coop, but everything I found had a design that seemed half doghouse, half toolshed, and was big enough to hold twenty hens. I had grown up in the suburbs and had spent twenty years in Manhattan. I was no sissy, but I knew my limits: I pictured myself with three or four full-grown hens, who lived in some sort of groovy little chicken house that didn't recall a faux Swiss chalet in a failed housing development.

One night, on the Internet, I was searching unlikely terms such as "cool-looking chicken coops" and "modern design chicken house," and came across the Eglu. A squat plastic dome that came in bright colors, the Eglu was compact and meant for just four hens. Better still, you could order it *with* hens—not six fuzzballs of indeterminate gender, and not the minimum order of twenty-five typical of most hatcheries, but even just two, on the brink of maturity (what chicken people call "point-of-lay"), delivered to a post office near you.

Recently, I spoke to Johannes Paul, one of the founders of Omlet, the British company that makes the Eglu. Paul was not initially a chicken person. He and the other three Omlet founders were industrial-design students at the Royal College of Art, in London, facing the paralyzing prospect of their thesis project in 2004. They were supposed to reconsider an ordinary object, and one of their mothers, who kept chickens, suggested designing a better chicken house. Commercially available coops, like homemade ones, were built of wood, which is hard to clean, hard to keep dry, and hard to seal well for insulation. "Plastic really is fantastic," Paul said. "Using the kind of rotational molding that we do means it has inherent insulation, and it's seamless, and it can be made in saturated colors." For the first time, a chicken house could look and feel modern. In fact, when the Eglu was first displayed a lot of people thought it was a new product from Apple.

Their professors loved it, and their friends and families were so enthusiastic that the students decided to try it out in the real world. They incorporated, priced the house at the equivalent of about six hundred dollars, and launched it, without any advertising, on their Web site. Omlet sold a thousand Eglus in the first year, and sales have tripled every year since. Most people ordered the Eglu complete with the optional chickens—and, according to Paul, for most customers it was the first time they had ever had chickens. Omlet was reluctant to sell the Eglu in the United States, because the cost of shipping was so high, and because the company felt that Americans were at least a decade

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behind Europeans in having an interest in organic, local food—that we were not yet a nation of chicken-keepers. But there were so many inquiries that, in 2006, Omlet decided to introduce it here.

Since then, TreeHugger.com, which monitors ecological trends, has gone from describing urban chicken-raising as a "weird eco-habit" to declaring it a "movement across North America." There have been successful challenges to anti-chicken-keeping laws in Fort Collins, Cleveland, Missoula, Ann Arbor, Madison, and South Portland, Maine, and guides published for anyone wanting to challenge anti-chicken ordinances in his or her town. There is a petition currently circulating urging the Obamas to add a chicken flock to the White House garden. ("Sasha and Malia will love them. Tad Lincoln kept a turkey he named Jack in the White House. Bring back this happy practice!") *Backyard Poultry*, a magazine that began publishing four years ago, is now distributing a hundred thousand copies. The publisher, Dave Belanger, says that stores are eager to carry it, while in the past, "I don't think you could have gotten a chicken magazine on a newsstand." Many pet stores are now carrying chicken feed alongside the racks of Fancy Feast and rawhide rolls. I recently came across the ultimate evidence of contemporary chicken ownership: instructions, on the blog Ikeahacker, for building a chicken coop out of furniture from Ikea.

The optional chickens available for the Eglu are supplied in the United States by McMurray Hatchery, an Iowa company that is the largest rare-breed poultry hatchery in the world (the catalogue offers a hundred and ten breeds). The company was founded in 1917 by Murray McMurray, an Iowa banker who, as a hobby, sold chickens out of the back of the bank. During the Depression, the bank failed, but the chicken business took off—a correlation that sounds a lot like the present day—and thus Banker McMurray became Hen-man McMurray. This year, McMurray Hatchery, which caters to people with back-yard flocks, sold 1.7 million chickens, ranging from day-old chicks, which cost two dollars each, to point-of-lay hens, which cost $12.95. For the past two years, operating at capacity, the hatchery has been sold out of all of its birds even before it was ready to ship. The only other year in recent memory in which it sold out was 1999. Bud Wood, the company president, attributes that to fear about the millennium. "When times are tough," he said, "people want chickens."

I ordered a chartreuse Eglu with four red hens. The Eglu came via U.P.S.; a few days later, the hens were delivered to the post office. "You have a package here," the postal clerk said when she called, "and it's clucking." I rushed into town, picked up the package—heavier than I had expected, smaller than I had pictured, as noisy as I had been warned. At home, I opened the box and decanted the hens into the attachable wire pen that comes with the Eglu. They were young but full-sized Rhode Island Red hybrids called Gingernut Rangers, with bright brown eyes and rich red feathers speckled with white. Their combs were small and pink and their knobby legs were bright yellow. Within six weeks or so, their combs would redden and their legs would pale—signs that they were about to start laying.

The knock on chickens has always been that they're stupid. Even some chicken fanciers hold this opinion. I had recently read an online comment from someone who announced cheerily that her chickens "are extremely entertaining due to the fact that they are dumb as stumps!" But my hens didn't seem stupid. They explored the pen with that stop-action motion that makes chickens look like cartoon characters, but with a brisk alertness and sharp curiosity. Right away, I figured out that "pecking order" isn't just a figure of speech: they adhered to a strict social system, with each hen taking her turn at the feeder, and corrective nips doled out to any chicken that stepped out of line.

When a few weeks had passed, and the birds were settled in, I let them out of their pen during the day to range around. If I was outside, they stayed near me, chuckling and purring as they pecked at bugs and grass. Because we have acres of meadow where they could have roamed free, they of course exhibited the contrarian impulse of all pets and decided that their favorite place to spend the afternoon was right at my front door, or in the planter box in the courtyard. But I was smitten. I found watching them soothing, and, to my surprise, as someone who has never liked housework, I enjoyed all my chicken-related labors—feeding and watering them and hosing out their Eglu. I especially loved going to the feed store and buying bales of hay for their nests and fifty-pound sacks of feed. It made me feel that I had legitimatized myself as a local. When one of my hens laid my first home-grown egg, I was as proud as if I had been attending my daughter's bat mitzvah.

There have been difficult moments, too. A few months after my hens arrived, my neighbor's two indolent old mutts roused themselves, clawed open the Eglu, and killed two of the birds. I was sick about it, but I restocked with four young chickens that I found through an online chicken group. Then I lost two of those. They were picked off in broad daylight, probably by a hawk or an owl or a coyote or a raccoon or a fox—everyone in the woods loves chicken, and chickens, which don't fly well, run fast, or fight hard, are sitting ducks. So I built a big fenced-in yard with netting over the top, and put the Eglu in it, and stopped letting the hens wander around loose. I had never thought of them as prey, but in the bucolic scenes I had imagined of chickens strolling across my lawn all the lip-smacking predators had been cropped out of the picture.

At one point, when I was down to two chickens, I noticed that one wasn't standing up properly. She also stopped laying eggs and lost a lot of weight. If I were a real farmer, I would have culled her—killed her—and been done with it. But I'm not a real farmer, so I began hauling her back and forth to the vet. He couldn't diagnose the problem, but he gave her an injection of steroids and a prescription for antibiotics. She didn't get any better: she couldn't even reach her food unless I held her up to the feeder. I called an avian expert I tracked down in Boston, who wasn't sure what to make of it, either. My research led me to something called Marek's disease, a contagious kind of chicken cancer that attacks the bird's nervous system and can kill a whole flock if it spreads. The sick bird had been my friendliest, calmest hen, the one that most enjoyed being held and stroked and that laid walloping big brown eggs. I had named her Beauty, but I noticed that the label on her antibiotics said "Patient: Chicken Orlean," which even in my funk I found hilarious.

After a month of hand-feeding her, dripping the antibiotics down her beak, and getting no diagnosis beyond my hunch that it might be Marek's, I finally realized that Chicken Orlean was miserable and there was nothing more I could do. I eat chicken all the time, so I am not morally opposed to killing a chicken, but I couldn't kill my own pet, so I took her back to the vet. After he injected her with the fatal dose of pentobarbital, I went out into the waiting room and sobbed. The room was empty except for a husky woman holding a snuffling tan pug. She came over and put an arm around me and said, "Oh, honey, I'm sorry. Was it your dog?"

"No," I said, my face in my hands, "it was my chicken."

Now I have seven chickens. I would say that I have seven hens, except that one—sweet, demure, shy Laura—recently proved my point about the challenges of chicken sexing, as she sprouted big red wattles and started crowing at dawn. So the new tally is that I have six hens and an unanticipated rooster. Meanwhile, the chicken movement seems to be expanding exponentially. I do detect a little overripening on the edges—I've noticed some late-stage phenomena such as chicken diapers, for people who want their chickens as house pets, and there will undoubtedly be chicken coops that go beyond the crisp functionality of the Eglu, with flourishes that push into the decadent.

Even people central to the chicken world are predicting what might supplant chickens, if and when chickens run their course. Dave Belanger, of *Backyard Poultry,* says goats; McMurray's Bud Wood thinks ducks. But chickens seem to me steadier than that. They have already survived hen bubbles and cholesterol scares and the enormous social change that chased them out of the back yard; they will survive diapers and jewelled coops and an uptick in ducks. The chicken, that thing with feathers, always sunny and useful, will endure. ♦

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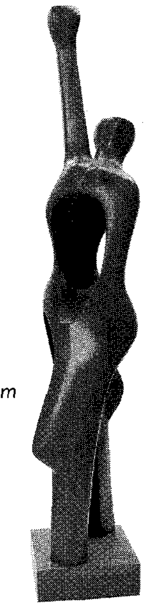

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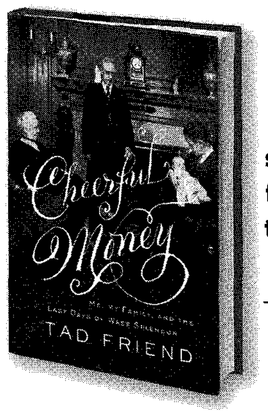

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

GETTING TO NO

The Republican dilemma in the age of Obama.

BY PETER J. BOYER

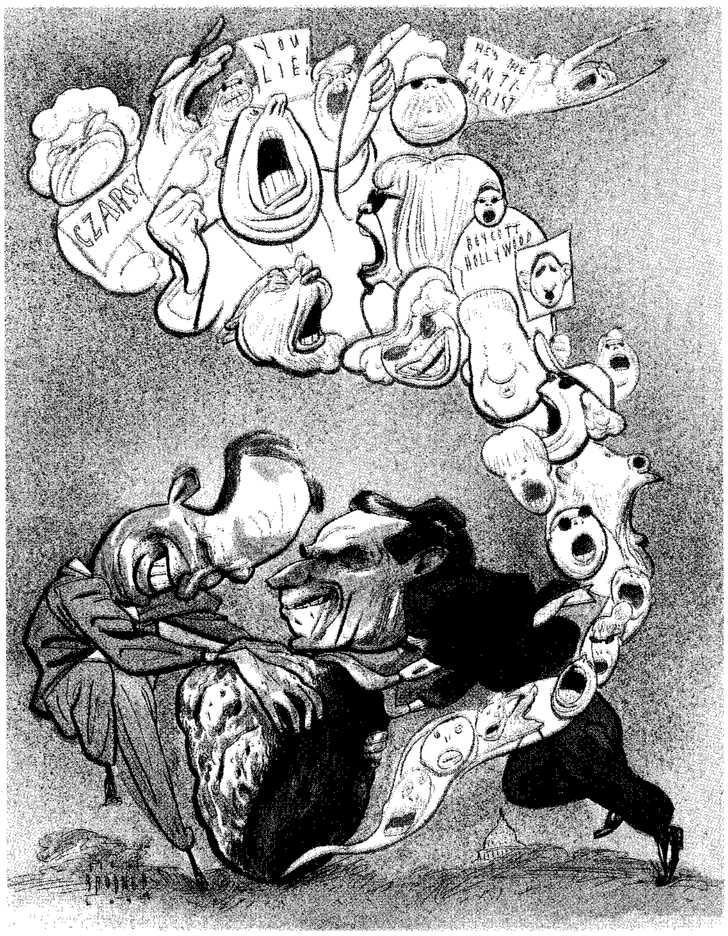
One morning in late spring, I travelled to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to hear a political talk by Pat Toomey, the man who had effectively driven Senator Arlen Specter out of the Republican Party. Toomey, a former congressman known for his unyielding conservatism, had come to be regarded by some of his fellow-Republicans as a sort of ideological kamikaze. They had warned that Toomey's decision to challenge Specter in the 2010 primary, announced after Specter's vote for President Obama's economic-stimulus package, would jeopardize a precious Republican seat in the Senate, and events proved them right. Specter, an unrepentant creedal heretic, bolted the Party, all but assuring Democrats a filibuster-proof majority. "If the Democrats do succeed in pushing through national health insurance, they really should set aside a little extra money to erect a statue to Pat Toomey," the Republican commentator David Frum observed. "They couldn't have done it without him!"

The Toomey challenge crystallized the stresses that tore at the Republican Party in the early months of the Barack Obama era. Toomey was a candidate of the conservative base, angered by the loss of power and dismayed by an irresolute Party establishment. Republican moderates and the Party's leadership, wary of the base, saw in Toomey's move the flawed impulses of a defeated and contracting Party, and did not disguise their exasperation. Senator John Cornyn, of Texas, whose job as chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee is to help elect Republican candidates, declined to endorse Toomey, and some Republicans tried to enlist, among others, the moderate former governor Tom Ridge as a candidate.

At the time, such trepidation seemed wholly warranted. The crash of the Bush Presidency and successive Democratic election victories had convinced much of the political class that the country had undergone a broad leftward realignment. As President Obama's approval ratings soared, and his programs were put in place, the Republican establishment became fixated on trying to moderate the Party's image in the hope of regaining the lost middle.

The principal argument against Toomey—who, as a congressman, had earned perfect ratings from the Christian Coalition and the American Conservative Union—was that he was too conservative to win in Pennsylvania. That had been the judgment made in 2004 by Karl Rove and George W. Bush, who decided to back Specter when Toomey first made a run for the Senate seat. Bush lost Pennsylvania that year, and since then Pennsylvania has trended ever more Democratic. In 2006, there were half a million more Democrats than Republicans in the state; by 2008, that gap had more than doubled. A Muhlenberg College poll last fall found that most of those Republican defectors left the Party because they thought that its positions had become too extreme. Shortly after Specter switched parties, earlier this year, a Quinnipiac University poll showed him leading Toomey by twenty points. Senator Orrin Hatch, Republican of Utah and the vice-chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, remarked of Toomey, "I don't think there is anybody in the world who believes he can get elected senator there."

In light of all this, Toomey's talk that morning in Bethlehem was instructive. Addressing a group of local building contractors, Toomey had the aspect, and the delivery, of an accountant at a tax seminar. "I usually start off with a little anecdote to warn you about what a terrible public speaker I am," he began, "but in the interest of time I'll just prove it, and get right to my comments." He talked about the economy, and the perils posed by the Democratic program in Washington. He worried, he said, about the federal government's expanding deficit spending and regulatory reach, about encroaching protectionism, and about the depressing effect of new taxes on capital formation. Toomey did not mention abortion, which he thinks should be prohibited, or gay marriage, which he also opposes. When someone in the audience offered a red-meat question—what did Toomey think of Sonia Sotomayor's "wise Latina woman" remark?—Toomey urged deference to Presidential prerogative. "I think we ought to give a nominee a fair chance," he said. "I think we ought to be willing to put her on the Court even if we don't agree with many of her policies. Republicans in the Senate, I think, ought to take that view."



DeMint and Toomey, who says he isn't "scary," channelled the base.

STEVE BRODNER

Regarding his dispirited and fractured party, Toomey said that the Republican tent had to make room for constituencies besides social conservatives, because they were essential to a winning coalition. It was an unexpected assertion from a candidate of Toomey's reputation, and after his speech I asked him what he'd meant. "I'm pretty conservative," he said. "I'm pro-life, for instance. But it never occurred to me that someone who is pro-choice can't be a good Republican, or shouldn't be part of our coalition. We can disagree about that issue, we can try to persuade each other about that issue, but that should never be a reason for excluding someone. On fiscal matters, nobody's got a monopoly on exactly what the right number is that we ought to be spending this year. Now, I think we've spent too much, and I'll argue that pretty forcefully. But reasonable people can disagree about what the right number is. Those are all very healthy discussions to have within a great party. But there does have to be a unifying theme—there has to be some idea that brings us together, or else it's completely meaningless."

That unifying idea—personal freedom, and its corollary, limited government—is not only Toomey's creed but his strategy as well. When Republicans talk about fiscal restraint and free enterprise, they aren't talking about the inflammatory issues that have spooked moderates and independents. "I understand that not everyone's going to agree with me, but almost nobody's frightened by this, right?" Toomey said to me. "I mean, nobody finds this offensive and objectionable that I'm passionate about personal freedom and limited government. It remains to be proven whether I can attract a majority of votes in a general election—I think I can, but I am pretty sure that this message is not going to drive people to the hills thinking, Oh, he's scary, we'd better stay away from him."

It was Toomey's calculation that Obama's policies and governing philosophy would do more to rehabilitate conservative doctrine than Republicans themselves ever could, and that by 2010, after two years of perpetual emergency and sweeping solutions, the American public would weary of making history and ask Republicans to apply a brake. The 2008 election results, he said, did not mean "that America's decided it wants to become Sweden." The way back for Republicans was through resolute opposition to the Obama spending programs, which carried the benefit of reasserting the Republican claim to fiscal modesty that was lost during the Bush years.

The Party's establishment figures, Toomey conceded, did not yet see the merits of his strategy. By summer, they were emulating it.

In April, when Arlen Specter was still weighing his options, he was approached one evening, during a Senate voting break, by a Republican colleague, Jim DeMint, who had news that he wanted to deliver personally. "I told him that I'd be supporting Toomey," DeMint recalled recently. Within a week, Specter was a Democrat, and DeMint made it clear that he was not especially sorry to see him go, telling the Washington *Examiner*, "I would rather have 30 Republicans in the Senate who really believe in principles of limited government, free markets, free people, than to have 60 that don't have a set of beliefs."

DeMint and Pat Toomey were natural allies. DeMint, the junior senator from South Carolina, was deeply sympathetic to the project that Toomey had run since 2005, the Club for Growth, a political organization that supported candidates who espoused the Club's insistent supply-side doctrine. (The Club's members contributed nearly eight hundred thousand dollars to DeMint's 2004 campaign.) The organization often focusses on competitive Republican primary races, because "we want to make sure a Republican seat is a free-market, conservative seat," Chris Chocola, who succeeded Toomey as the Club's president this year, says. That posture has invited the portrayal of the Club as an ideological enforcer—"a despicable political hit organization," as Mike Huckabee once put it.

DeMint and Toomey stood on the side of the Republican divide which believed the Party had failed because it had strayed from its core principles. "When I came into the Senate, we had a Republican President in the White House, a good majority of Republicans in the House, and my group made it fifty-five in the

Senate," DeMint says. "Yet we allowed the big spenders to basically drive all of our policy. And, while we were talking about being the party of limited government, we were blowing the roof off of budgets and earmarks. So it doesn't matter if we have sixty Republicans acting like that. We're not going to win elections, and we're going to lose again. I think it's just important to be real."

Like Toomey, DeMint believed that Obama and congressional Democrats would inevitably overreach, and that if Republicans held fast in opposition the Party could regain its lost identity. DeMint is a first-term senator in establishment Washington, and his official standing is reflected in a New York *Times* assessment of him this summer as "a back-bencher with little influence in Washington's corridors of power." But, like another conservative back-bencher impatient with the constraints of institutional traditions, Newt Gingrich in the nineteen-eighties, DeMint has managed to become a leading insurrectionary voice despite his junior status.

When DeMint arrived in the Senate, in 2005, he quickly gravitated toward a body of conservative senators known as the Senate Steering Committee. The group met for lunch each Wednesday, but its larger purpose was to devise strategies to thwart legislation that was deemed fiscally (or otherwise) imprudent, even in a Republican-led Congress. Senate procedure rules allowed for an array of useful tactics, such as stalling a bill with a swarm of amendments. DeMint showed both enthusiasm and aptitude for the mission, and before he'd been in the Senate two years he was elected the committee's chairman.

With Bush in the White House and Republicans still controlling the Senate, DeMint didn't hesitate to buck Party leadership or White House imperatives. He was instrumental in killing Bush's immigration-reform proposal, annoying his more senior colleagues with his guerrilla tactics (to the point that Trent Lott withheld a seventy-five-hundred-dollar donation to the Steering Committee), and fought against the Troubled Asset Relief Program. The Inauguration of Obama and the convening of the 111th Congress, with its big Democratic majorities, were liberating events for DeMint. He was one of Washington's most ardent opponents of the stimulus package ("the worst piece of economic legislation Congress has considered in a hundred years . . . a mugging . . . a fraud"), and he was against the President's budget, the Congress's omnibus spending bill, the automaker bailouts, the bank bailouts, the closing of the prison facility at Guantánamo Bay, and the expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program. He was one of two senators who voted against confirming Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State.

Before completing his first term in the Senate, DeMint had firmly established himself as the heir to the original "Senator No," the late Jesse Helms, of North Carolina—a co-founder and former chairman of the Senate Steering Committee. But, whereas Helms practiced conservative politics in a manner that a critic once described as "mean for Jesus," DeMint, a former marketing consultant, presented a more genial, telegenic presence, and he took pains to couch his criticism of Obama's policies in expressions of kind regard for Obama: "I like President Obama very much. . . . I believe he wants to do what is best for our country."

That was the prudent posture when Obama's approval ratings were near seventy per cent. But, well before the summer health-care deadlock, there were signs that public faith in government solutions, and in Obama himself, was wavering. The Administration's bailouts of Chrysler and General Motors were, as the President himself noted, broadly unpopular. Democratic spending animated the conservative base, prompting the Tea Party protest movement in the spring, which, by summer, had morphed into the health-care town-hall offensive. In May, faced with dire warnings about an impending budget emergency, California voters rejected five state ballot measures that would have bailed out the state in part by raising taxes. By June, when the national unemployment rate climbed toward ten per cent, doubts about the President's stimulus program had hardened into skepticism. The President's most famous Republican supporter, Colin Powell, publicly expressed concern about "the number of programs that are being presented, the bills associated with these programs, and the additional government that will be needed to execute them." Powell fretted that the President and his team were trying to do too much too quickly. "We can't pay for it all," he said on CNN.

Even the President's standing in the popular culture showed signs of slipping. On "The Daily Show," Jon Stewart gently mocked Obama's familiarity with Urdu poetry: "That's great. Just fix the economy!"

For Democrats, over the summer bad polling poured like a pestilential rain. An ABC News/Washington *Post* poll showed that more people strongly disapproved of Obama's handling of the economy, health care, and the deficit than strongly approved. An NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll conducted during the health-care promotion offensive showed that a plurality of Americans believed his program

would make their health care worse, not better. Several polls showed that Obama had lost ground significantly among Democratic moderates. By late summer, his support among independents, the key factor in his election, had dramatically diminished.

Now DeMint's criticism of the President became more frontal. In a July 17th teleconference call with activists opposing Obama's health-care initiative, DeMint said, "If we are able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo." He added, "It will break him, and we will show that we can, along with the American people, begin to push those freedom solutions that work in every area of our society."

In the following days, Obama cited DeMint's comments repeatedly, hoping to show that opposition to his reform was political, and personal. DeMint shrugged it off. "He was trying to get attention away from the bill," the Senator told me.

With his "Waterloo" remark, DeMint emerged as the de-facto voice of the Republican opposition, a development that some people on his side found unsettling. Lamar Alexander, John Cornyn, and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell publicly lamented the "distraction" that DeMint had caused; George Voinovich, Republican of Ohio, was less circumspect. "It's the Southerners," he said. "They get on TV and go, 'Errrr, errrr.' People hear them and say, 'These people, they're Southerners. The Party's being taken over by Southerners. What the hell they got to do with Ohio?'"

"I have kind of raised the temperature a little bit," DeMint told me. "And I've gotten further out front. And some people are starting to follow that path."

DeMint had tapped into the wrath of the conservative base, which was magnified by Fox News, talk radio, and the Internet. He was certain that the public mood was turning, even if many of his Senate colleagues were slow to realize it. "The Senate is going to be the last place that changes," he told me in July. "It's downstream of everything else. It's what we in marketing used to call the 'late adopters.' And when they see people rioting in the streets they'll say, 'Wait a minute, maybe we oughta go where they're going.' Tradition and status quo are real important here, but I think more and more of the Republican senators are seeing the direction of the country, and that it might be safer to do what they really believe. And I do think most Republicans here do believe in limited government and less spending. But it's so enticing to try to bring money back with earmarks and other things that we've gotten into. There's some bad habits that we've got to break. But I do sense things coming my way."

In leading the opposition to the President's health-care initiative, DeMint has been at pains to note that he has introduced health-care-reform bills every year that he has been in the Senate. The DeMint plan, characteristic of other Republican market-oriented reform proposals, would free insurance companies to sell policies across state lines, and pay for vouchers for the uninsured by repealing TARP.

When I asked Arlen Specter about DeMint's plan, he laughed. "You need a way to reduce costs, you need a way to cover the uninsured and the underinsured, you need specifics on insurance-company reform, and you need an over-all program," Specter said. "And he's already identified his governmental philosophy—saying no."

DeMint does not dispute this. "We do have to be the Party of No for more spending, more debt, more taxes, more government takeovers," he says. "We've got to be the Party of No for that."

Arlen Specter's office in the Capitol Building, hidden along a quiet corridor near the chambers of the old Supreme Court, is one of the prizes of his station. The room, with its high ceilings and its view of the East Capitol, is the sort of perquisite that signals status in the hierarchical culture of the U.S. Senate. The office is secluded, yet near the Senate floor. During recurring bouts of Hodgkin's lymphoma, Specter slipped into it once or twice a day to sleep off the effects of chemotherapy. It was there that he and his Republican colleague Susan Collins, of Maine, worked out a way to support the President's stimulus plan. Occasionally, the office served as a venue for the Wednesday Lunch Group, the key but vanishing bloc of moderate Republicans in the Senate.

In past campaigns, Specter has sought to protect his perpetually endangered seat by pleading seniority, and he had counted on doing so again in 2010. After he crossed the aisle, though, his new fellow-Democrats voted to deny him seniority status within the Party; he kept his hideaway office (a nonpartisan privilege) but became the low man for committee assignments, including on the Judiciary Committee, which he once chaired. Other disappointments followed. President Obama and Ed Rendell, the governor of Pennsylvania, tried to clear the Democratic primary field for Specter, but Joe Sestak, a congressman and a former three-star admiral, jumped into the race and struck a chord with Democrats who were long accustomed to voting against Specter. The five-term incumbent found himself caught between old enmities and new. A poll published by Franklin & Marshall College in late June showed that only twenty-eight per cent of Pennsylvania voters thought that Specter should get another term.

Specter had no choice except to become a Democrat. In his long career, he had never been one of the Senate's beloved figures, but his determinedly heterodox posture had often placed him at a pivotal point in moments of great decision. His opposition, in 1987, to Robert Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court succeeded in killing it, and without him Obama's stimulus bill would not have passed. In the last Congress, when Senate Republicans voted with the majority of their Party eight times out of ten, and Democrats voted the Party line nine times out of ten, Specter joined Democrats in nearly a third of his votes. This profile led Obama to praise Specter as one of the "thoughtful Republicans," but that was precisely what made him anathema to conservative activists. In 2004, the Republican base in Pennsylvania nearly unseated Specter, and Specter's own polling showed that he stood little chance against Toomey in next year's election. "After the stimulus vote, the right wing wanted to use me for target practice," Specter told me. "There was a resolution filed in state committee for censure. One of my offices was picketed. And then I travelled the state meeting with Republicans, all the way from Easton to Pittsburgh, and there was no doubt that that vote was very widely repudiated."

Specter told me that when he entered the Senate, in the Reagan sweep of 1980, he joined fifteen Republican moderates in the Wednesday Lunch Group, representing every region of the country. (He named them all, from William Cohen, of Maine, to John Warner, of Virginia.) "When George W. Bush was elected, we had five people," he says. Then Jim Jeffords, of Vermont, became an Independent, and Lincoln Chafee was defeated by his Democratic opponent. With Specter's defection, only Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins remain. As the Party turns south geographically, and inward ideologically, Specter says, it inevitably becomes a smaller, if purer, thing. "That's not a belief," he says. "It's an arithmetical fact."

It's the arithmetic of political defeat, as shell-shocked Republicans learned in consecutive election cycles. The loss of Congress in 2006 sent the Republican Party into a period of pained introspection, its partisans divided (sometimes bitterly) into roughly two camps: those who insisted that renewal could come from a return to low-tax, limited-government fundamentals; and reformers who believed that the Party had become too harshly doctrinaire and urgently needed to broaden its appeal.

Specter says that the Party has now become a captive of the DeMint wing, and that its opposition strategy cannot carry it far. "The Party does not have room for Colin Powell—it is represented by Sarah Palin," he says. "Being the Party of No is not a success. It will not be a success."

This summer, Republicans rebounded to a degree that many would have considered impossible a few months ago, when the death of conservatism was a dominant theme in political discourse. The Party has recruited a field of promising congressional candidates, and senses a big opportunity in 2010 ("the toughest midterm election that Democrats have ever faced," Nancy Pelosi predicts). Earlier this month, the political analyst Charlie Cook, the consensus authority of the Washington establishment, warned Democrats that the signs are there for a "wave" election similar to the 2006 election that gave Democrats control of Congress. "With fourteen months to go before the 2010 midterm election, something could happen to improve the outlook for Democrats," Cook wrote. "However, wave elections, more often than not, start just like this: The president's ratings plummet; his party loses its advantage on the generic congressional ballot test; the intensity of opposition-party voters skyrockets; his own party's voters become complacent or even depressed; and independent voters move lopsidedly away. These were the early-warning signs of past wave elections. Seeing them now should terrify Democrats."

Within the Republican Party, the intensity is all on the side of the aggrieved base, and politicians who might once have accommodated President Obama must now think twice. Charlie Crist, the moderate Republican governor of Florida, praised Obama's stimulus plan in January, and welcomed the President to Florida with an embrace. Now, as a candidate for the U.S. Senate, Crist is fending off a spirited primary challenge from a young movement conservative, Marco Rubio, the former speaker of the Florida House of Representatives. Crist has a huge advantage in money and name recognition, as well as the support of the national Republican establishment, but he hears boos when he addresses local Republican gatherings. Rubio has the endorsement of Jim DeMint, and he continues to win straw-poll votes among local Party activists. The son of working-class Cuban immigrants, Rubio speaks of his campaign in terms of mission. "I'm not just interested in winning this election," he told me this summer. "I'm interested in winning the hearts and minds and support of people for our view of government, and our view of the world."

When I next spoke to Pat Toomey, in midsummer, his mood was decidedly upbeat. He had raised $1.6 million in the first quarter of his campaign, and establishment Republicans had embraced him. John Cornyn sent him a campaign contribution, and finally gave Toomey his endorsement. Toomey was also making inroads with Pennsylvania moderates. On the day that we spoke, a new Quinnipiac poll was released, showing Toomey and Specter in a virtual tie. Soon afterward, a new poll showed Toomey comfortably leading both Specter and Specter's Democratic primary opponent, Representative Joe Sestak.

Toomey has, of course, welcomed Sestak's primary challenge of Specter, which makes his own tack toward the center smoother. Earlier this month, Toomey and Sestak conducted a joint town-hall session on health care, which the *Times* noted for its civil tone; after the event, the two Specter opponents repaired to a local tavern for beers. The Club for Growth, meanwhile, has launched a campaign encouraging Specter donors who are unhappy with his party switch to ask for their money back.

Specter, on the other hand, has Barack Obama. When Specter defected, the President promised him his full-bore support, and almost immediately began to make good on that promise. He appeared with Specter at a Hollywood fund-raiser in May, and last week the two men travelled together to Pennsylvania, where the President headlined an event in which nearly $2.5 million was raised for Specter and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Although a Rasmussen poll of "likely voters" showed Toomey with a sizable lead in August, a Franklin & Marshall survey of registered voters was more promising for Specter, showing the incumbent eight points ahead of Toomey.

Opposition can unify and exhilarate an out party, as Democrats proved earlier this decade, and it is a primal conservative impulse. William F. Buckley, Jr.,'s 1955 mission statement in the début issue of *National Review* remains part of the conservative liturgy: "It stands athwart history, yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it."

There is risk in a strategy of opposition; too ardently expressed, it can make Republicans seem extreme, as Representative Joe Wilson's "You lie!" outburst during the President's health-care speech to Congress on September 9th demonstrated. Wilson used the notoriety to raise a lot of money, and he became a folk hero on the populist right, but the incident gave Democrats an opportunity to portray Obama's opponents as extremist ideologues, and even as racists.

The question remaining for many Republicans is whether the Party can develop a strategy beyond opposition, an argument for governing that will expand its appeal beyond its ideological core. On this, Toomey finds himself in agreement with Arlen Specter. "Having thirty principled Republicans doesn't accomplish anything, and that's not acceptable," he told me. "Our mission, and our focus, has to be to find a way to bring people into our tent." ♦

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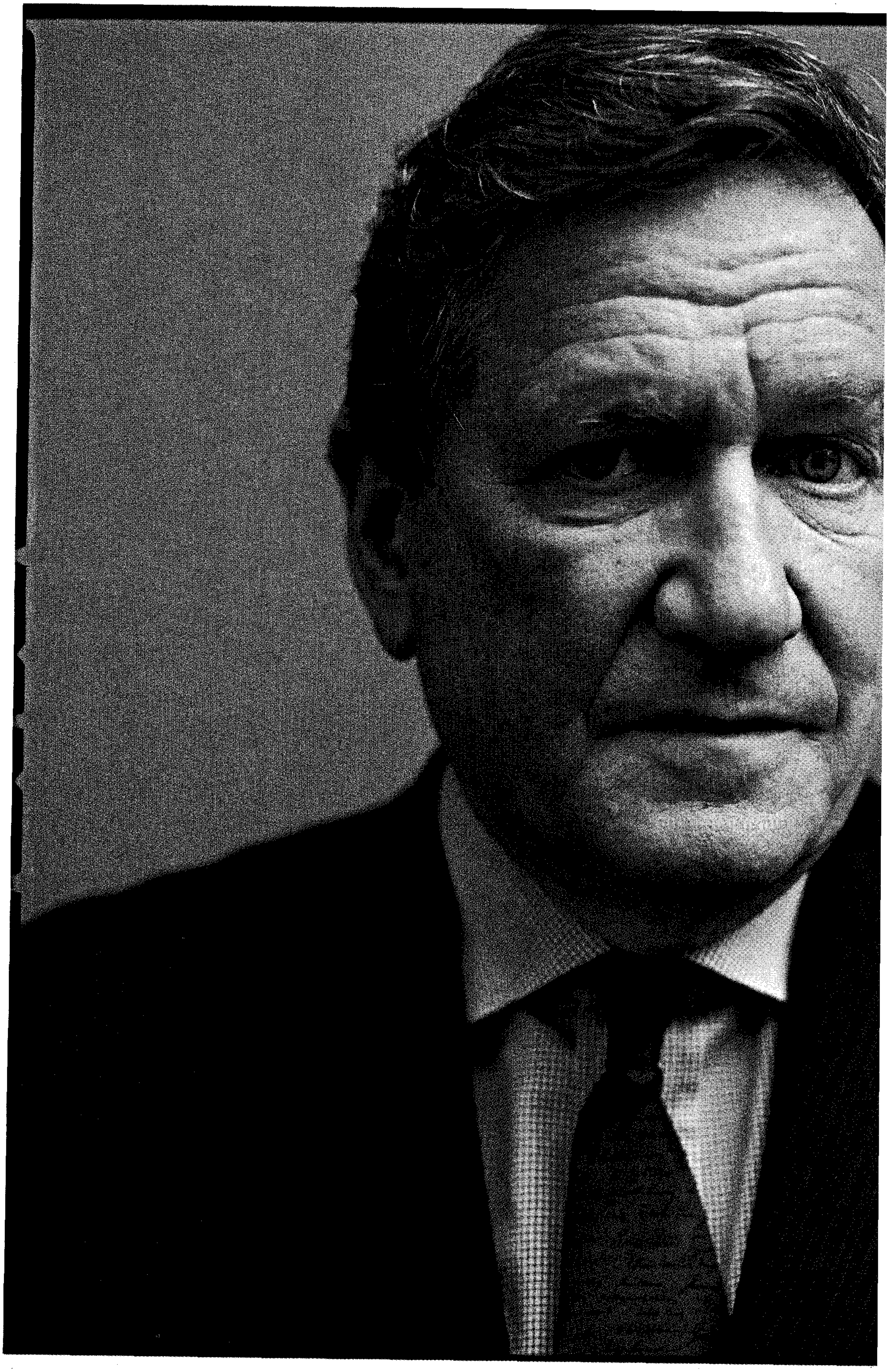


A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE LAST MISSION

Richard Holbrooke's plan to avoid the mistakes of Vietnam in Afghanistan.

BY GEORGE PACKER

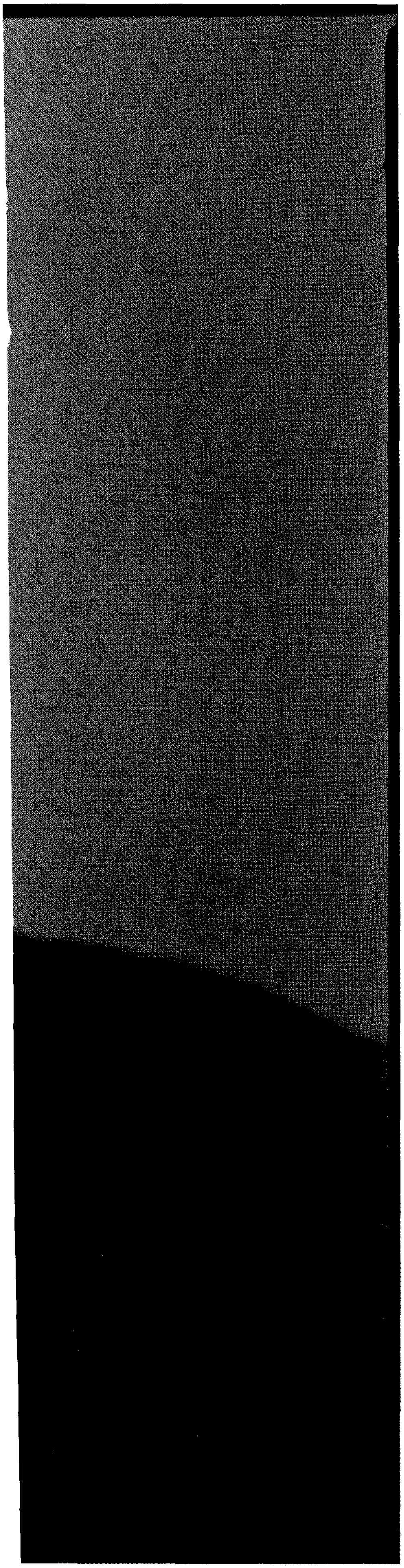
A week after being elected President, Barack Obama summoned Richard Holbrooke to his transition headquarters, at the Hilton Hotel in Chicago. To some members of Obama's staff, the invitation was surprising: Obama and Holbrooke hardly knew each other, and Holbrooke had firmly supported Hillary Clinton during the primaries. Although Holbrooke, a State Department veteran, had been careful not to disparage Obama, the President-elect's advisers saw him as a problematic, if rare, talent. Holbrooke had a reputation for creating drama—speaking ill of rivals in government, hotly pursuing the press—and it was not clear that he could play unselfishly on the fanatically disciplined Obama team. In June, 2008, after Clinton dropped out of the race, Holbrooke began working his connections to the Obama campaign so aggressively that several friends warned him to tone it down. Holbrooke had important links to the new Administration, but his enemies nearly outnumbered his friends. What's more, in the view of several White House aides, Holbrooke epitomized something that Obama had run against: a Democratic foreign-policy establishment that had supported the invasion of Iraq more on political grounds than on substantive ones, and that had spent years warding off Republican attacks on its lack of "toughness" instead of devising a national-security strategy that recognized the limits of American power.

Holbrooke, who is sixty-eight, had served under every Democratic President since John F. Kennedy, and Obama was familiar with his record, which extended from the Vietnam War, in the sixties, to the Balkan conflicts of the nineties; during the final eighteen months of Bill Clinton's Presidency, Holbrooke served as Ambassador to the United Nations. In the past two decades, whenever a Democrat was poised to take the White House, a sideshow has centered on Holbrooke's potential place in a new Administration. On several occasions, the position of Secretary of State—which he has coveted practically since he joined the foreign service, in 1962—has narrowly eluded him. In 1996, Hillary Clinton urged her husband to name the first female Secretary of State, and Madeleine Albright got the job over Holbrooke, who had recently led negotiations ending the war in Bosnia. Strobe Talbott, the president of the Brookings Institution, who served as Deputy Secretary of State under Bill Clinton, told me that, in 2000, "if Al Gore had been allowed to assume the Presidency, I believe Holbrooke would have been his Secretary of State." In 2004, Holbrooke was reportedly on John Kerry's short list. "It's a brass ring that he kept grasping for and missing," Talbott said.

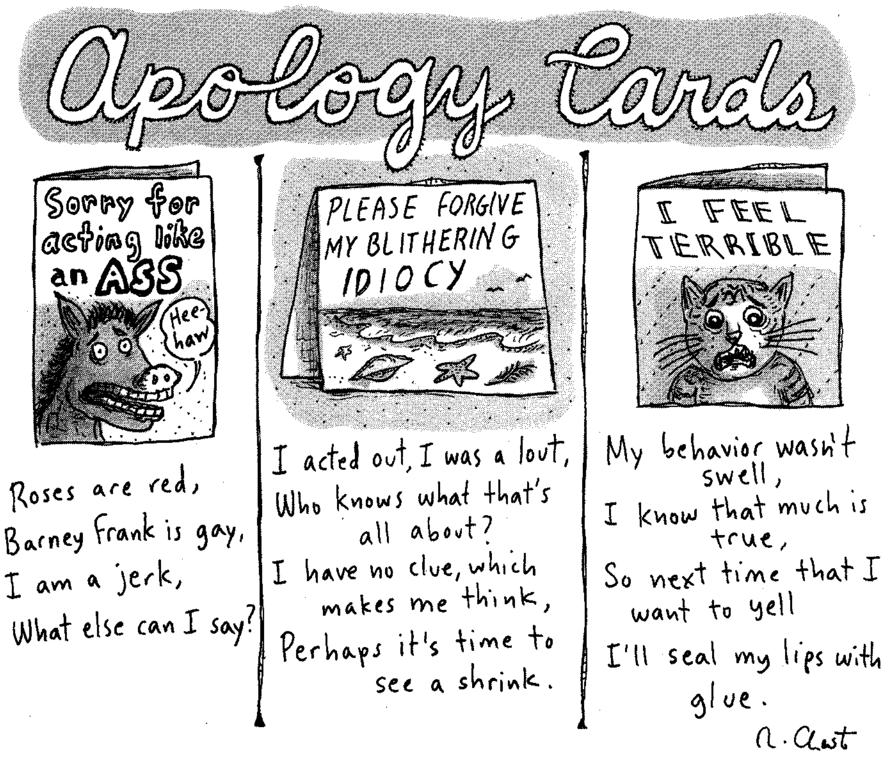
This time, Holbrooke was never in the running. In Chicago, he spoke with the President-elect for nearly an hour. He left with the sense that he would not be excluded from serving in what could be the last Democratic Presidency of his professional life. But Obama already knew that he wanted Hillary Clinton as his Secretary of State. The choice softened the blow; she was Holbrooke's ally, and her power far exceeded that of all competitors. An Obama adviser said, "It was the one Secretary of State he could accept with peace in his heart, because it was just a wholly different species of person."

Obama, meanwhile, had decided that Holbrooke should take on the hardest foreign-policy problem that the Administration faced: Afghanistan and Pakistan. Related insurgencies threatened both governments; Al Qaeda had regrouped in the mountains along the border between the countries; in Afghanistan, American troops were bogged down in a war that was rapidly deteriorating.

Holbrooke had made trips to Af-



Special Representative Holbrooke, in New York. Photograph by Brigitte Lacombe.


Apology Cards
Sorry for acting like an ASS
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I am a jerk,
What else can I say?
PLEASE FORGIVE MY BLITHERING IDIOCY
I acted out, I was a lout,
Who knows what that's all about?
I have no clue, which makes me think,
Perhaps it's time to see a shrink.
I FEEL TERRIBLE
My behavior wasn't swell,
I know that much is true,
So next time that I want to yell
I'll seal my lips with glue.
R. Chast

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ghanistan as a private citizen, in 2006 and 2008, travelling around the country, talking to Afghans from different backgrounds. He had written op-eds in the Washington *Post* proposing changes in American policy. The eradication of poppy fields in southern Afghanistan had alienated Afghan farmers and barely reduced heroin trafficking; Holbrooke argued that the U.S. should focus instead on apprehending high-level drug dealers, including those with ties to the government of President Hamid Karzai. The Bush Administration had given nearly unconditional support to Karzai, under whom "officially sanctioned corruption and the drug trade" had revitalized the Taliban. Holbrooke also recommended more development aid for the new democratic government in Pakistan, especially in the tribal regions, which had turned into a sanctuary for jihadists while the Bush Administration accepted the assurances of Pervez Musharraf, the country's President at the time, that he was fighting extremism. Afghanistan and Pakistan now constituted a single theatre of war, Holbrooke wrote, where America would have an unavoidable interest long after the war in Iraq was history. "The conflict in Afghanistan will be far more costly and much, much longer than Americans realize," he wrote in March, 2008. "This war, already in its seventh year, will eventually become the longest in American history."

The Obama adviser said, "There's almost an inevitability or gravitational force that pulls Holbrooke into relevant circles, because he makes himself indispensable." A few days after being selected Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton called Holbrooke to offer him the job. In late November, they talked for three hours at Essex House, in New York. He already had a detailed conception of the new position. For starters, he would not be a "special envoy"—the title given to George Mitchell, Obama's chief negotiator for the Middle East. "I've done that," Holbrooke told me. (Under Bill Clinton, he had been a special envoy for both Cyprus and Kosovo.) " 'Envoy' is an elegant diplomatic word. . . . I have nothing against it. It's an honored and treasured word. It means *envoi*—you're sent to do things. I was given a different task." He wanted to be a "special representative." The difference was more than semantic: in addition to being an emissary to the region, Holbrooke would run operations on the civilian side of American policy. He would create a rump regional bureau within the State Department, carved out of the Bureau of South and Central Asia, whose Afghanistan and Pakistan desks would report directly to him. He would assemble outside experts and officials from various government agencies to work for him, and he would report to the President through Hillary Clinton. Clinton told Holbrooke that he would be the civilian counterpart to General David Petraeus, the military head of Central Command. "I laughed," Holbrooke told me. "I said, 'He has more airplanes than I have telephones.' "

When Holbrooke was in his mid-thirties, he had been the youngest ever Assistant Secretary of State, for East Asia, under Jimmy Carter. Two decades later, in his mid-fifties, he had served as Bill Clinton's Assistant Secretary for Europe. Now, another decade on, he was to be a de-facto Assistant Secretary again—he described himself to me as "a junior, non-Cabinet-level official." Holbrooke's career appeared to be charting one of the longest plateaus in the history of the foreign service. In fact he took the mandate from Obama and Clinton and defined his role in a way that has made it unprecedented in American diplomacy.

According to several sources, Holbrooke thought that India and Iran, which played essential roles in the regional conflict, should also be part of his portfolio. (Holbrooke denies this.) But Iran was taken away by the White House, which appointed Dennis Ross to be the special adviser on the nuclear issue and other matters, and India was taken away by the Indians, who refused to be included in an office set up for fragile states beset with Islamist insurgencies. Obama had mentioned the conflict in Kashmir twice in the weeks after the election, and the government in New Delhi "went berserk," according to someone familiar with the situation. Holbrooke later turned the setback into a quip: he was going to get through his new job without ever uttering the "K-word."

Other than an airplane of his own, Holbrooke got everything he wanted. He was in charge of "Af-Pak"—a phrase that he used to make the point that the two countries could not be dealt with separately, as the Bush Administration had done, and that the war in Afghanistan could be resolved only by addressing the complex problems of Pakistan. Obama had been elected, in part, on a commitment to get America out of Iraq, and on a promise to show the world a less pugnacious face. But he had also stated his intention to intensify the war effort in Afghanistan, because Al Qaeda and the Taliban had reconstituted themselves. "Af-Pak's tricky for him," a senior Administration official said of Obama. "He's always prided himself on being aware of the limits of American power and on knowing how to use it pragmatically. But he's also pragmatic enough to see that this is the main threat." When asked if Af-Pak was the biggest foreign-policy gamble of Obama's Presidency, the official said, "Oh, yes. And he's aware of that." So the odd problem out was also the most important one, and for guidance the youthful new President had turned to one of the last icons of an earlier era, in which American greatness was assumed, the country's diplomacy had expansive ambitions, and its foreign policy was dominated by a few men—among them Clark Clifford, Maxwell Taylor, Averell Harriman, and Dean Rusk, all of whom had been Holbrooke's patrons.

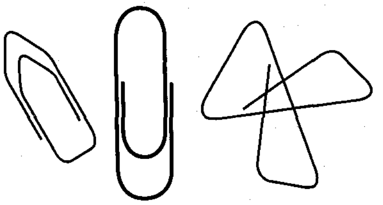
On January 22nd, when Hillary Clinton announced Holbrooke's appointment at the State Department, Holbrooke spotted John Negroponte in the audience. They had become friends in 1964, when both were doing diplomatic work in Saigon. In his remarks, Holbrooke mentioned their Vietnam connection. "I hope we will produce a better outcome this time," he said with a smile. That day, he received a congratulatory e-mail from the first boss he ever had, Rufus Phillips, who for several years was in charge of civilian counter-insurgency in South Vietnam. Holbrooke answered the e-mail in one sentence: "It's worse than the Nam!"

Holbrooke is a big man with a small head, and his frame is dominated by a square-shouldered trunk perched on long, thin legs. Friends he made in his twenties say that his character was fully formed by then. Leslie Gelb, the former *Times* columnist, was an aide to Senator Jacob Javits, of New York, when he met Holbrooke, in 1966. "He walked into the front office and asked to see the Senator," Gelb said. "I think he was twelve years old at the time." (Holbrooke was twenty-five, and working at the White House.) "In fact, he insisted on speaking to the Senator, but they shovelled him off to me, much to his expressed consternation. He wanted to talk to Javits about his views of Vietnam, of which he had many."

In pictures from his high-school yearbook and from his years in Vietnam, Holbrooke is almost always smiling behind the thick black frames of his glasses. His features remain deceptively mild, as does his voice, which applies pressure with the quiet relentlessness of an underwater current. Holbrooke has been known to yell (during the negotiations over Bosnia, he browbeat the Serbian dictator, Slobodan Milosevic), but his usual strategy, in the manner of Lyndon Johnson, is to deploy cajolery, flattery, criticism, analysis, implied threat, teasing humor, fibs—any means at his disposal—to exert his will on a counterpart. Usually, he prevails.

"I wouldn't call it conversation," Gelb said. "It's this sort of breathless monologue that you can only engage by interrupting. Dick is an advocate. He almost always has a case to make." Holbrooke's forcefulness is tempered by an endearing vulnerability—the nakedness of his ambitions and pleasures and insecurities. He takes pains arranging the seating chart for official dinners. Between government jobs, he worked as an investment banker, and, according to *USA Today*, he's worth at least seventeen million dollars, but he still looks as if he'd dressed in a hurry. He reads voraciously, writes quickly and well, and consumes large quantities of schlock entertainment. (Holbrooke is especially fond of "There's Something About Mary.") His great advantage over most colleagues and opponents is his analytic and synthetic prowess, which allows him, for example, to break down the reasons for the Taliban's successful propaganda campaign in the tribal areas while connecting it to imperial British history in the region. As for his flaws, he seems remarkably unaware of them. Holbrooke cannot be kidded about the trait for which he's best known: his ego.

The notion that Holbrooke craves attention, which he bitterly resents and constantly feeds, is accurate but misleading. Far from undermining those he works for, Holbrooke is a loyal servant to power, with an old-fashioned respect for the Presidency. Once he took the new job, the restlessness and anxiety about his place in the order of things subsided, his energy found its proper outlet, and he bore down, in Strobe Talbott's words, like "a precision-guided munition."



Holbrooke, in turn, inspires great loyalty. Christopher Hill, the American Ambassador in Baghdad, who worked under Holbrooke during the Bosnia negotiations, said, "If you have enemies—and he does—you also need friends, and he has a lot." The Obama Administration is crowded with officials in their thirties and forties who are former Holbrooke protégés, and though they acknowledge that he could be brutal with his staff, they still regard the experience as a high point of their careers; they were given serious responsibilities and made to feel that they were part of something historic. Holbrooke's relationships with his seniors and subordinates are less turbulent than those with his peers, such as James Dobbins, who followed Holbrooke as special envoy to the Balkans, and who found himself in constant conflict with his predecessor. "It's the flip side of his good side," Talbott said. "If you're not on the team and you're in his way, God help you."

A close friend of Holbrooke's joked, "If I paid attention to some of the specific things he did, I would have murdered him." The friend said of Holbrooke's aggressiveness, "He doesn't even know he's doing it, and that's why he didn't become Secretary of State. But, in terms of talent, it is far in excess of what you see around you."

Gahl Burt, a former aide to Henry Kissinger, met Holbrooke at the State Department in the seventies and remains a close friend. She said, "I know people dislike Dick Holbrooke. There are people who won't sit in the same room with him. But what I love about him is he has a heart." She mentioned work that he had done on AIDS prevention and refugee assistance. "He's irrepressible, which makes him successful with a Slobodan Milosevic," Burt said. "Richard is a bully with a heart. And people know it and admire it, and so they put up with the bullying."

In August, 2008, at a writers' conference in Sun Valley, Idaho, Holbrooke shared a stage with Shashi Tharoor, the Indian diplomat, who lost out to Ban Ki-moon in the competition to succeed

Kofi Annan as Secretary-General of the United Nations. The topic—the future of the U.N.—could not have been more anodyne, and Tharoor's opening remarks made the familiar point that the Security Council is outmoded and needs to be enlarged. Almost instinctively, as if he needed to shatter the polite mood and dominate the stage, Holbrooke systematically exposed the conflicting national interests that would arise, until Tharoor's suggestion had been demolished. Tharoor mustered a diplomatic smile as Holbrooke concluded, "In thirty years, there will be a committee still studying the issue, and you, Shashi, will be on it."

Next to Holbrooke's desk in his office, on the first floor of the State Department, hangs a black-and-white photograph of him as a young man, walking in the sun-saturated Mekong Delta next to Ambassador Maxwell Taylor and several Vietnamese officials. Although Holbrooke made his international reputation by negotiating peace in Bosnia, his professional life was shaped in Vietnam. "I lived, ate, and slept Vietnam," Holbrooke wrote in an unpublished 1992 essay. "At times, I thought I knew more about it than almost anyone else—certainly more than anyone higher-ranking than me in the U.S. government." Holbrooke's experience with Vietnam foreshadowed, in uncanny ways, his latest and, he insists, final mission.

Holbrooke had originally wanted to be a journalist. He was the sports editor of his high-school paper, in Scarsdale, New York, and then, at Brown University, he edited the *Daily Herald.* But James Reston, the Washington bureau chief of the *Times*, declined to hire him straight out of college. For Holbrooke, it was the *Times* or nothing, and he abandoned his journalistic ambitions. Yet he always befriended reporters who covered the international conflicts in which he was involved, taking an acute interest in their work and relationships, offering unsolicited advice on how to write their stories, and sometimes identifying more with them than with his staid official colleagues. "He loved reporters," Frank G. Wisner, a retired ambassador and a close friend of Holbrooke, said. "He had an instinct what to feed reporters, what to deny them—how you used your access to the reportorial class to advance your own bureaucratic agenda." A State Department official said, "At his very core, he's a frustrated foreign correspondent. He thinks like a journalist, he's dogged like a journalist—he'll go to the source instead of just getting canned briefings. He thinks in narratives."

At Scarsdale High School, Holbrooke's best friend and fellow-editor was David Rusk, a son of Dean Rusk. In 1957, when Holbrooke was fifteen, his father, a doctor, died, and he grew closer to the Rusk family. The next year, Dean Rusk spoke at the high school about the foreign service—the first Holbrooke had heard of it. Then came the bright optimism of the New Frontier, with President Kennedy's stirring call to "ask not," and Rusk became Secretary of State. "I'm a product of the Kennedy era," Holbrooke said. "Kennedy's Inaugural plus the accident of Dean Rusk brought me into the government. Those were my values."

Holbrooke was barely twenty-one when he entered the foreign service, in 1962. The next year, he arrived in South Vietnam, just as the U.S. was being pulled deeper into the political chaos of a guerrilla war. Because he was a bachelor, Holbrooke was assigned to a post outside Saigon, as the top American civilian in a poor province in the Lower Mekong Delta called Ba Xuyen. He lived alone above a shop, took showers from a cistern, and went out to the U.S. airbase five or six nights a week to watch whatever movie happened to be showing. (He saw "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" a dozen times.) "The terrible truth that people do not like to admit was that the war was fun for young men, at least it was fun if they were civilians or journalists," Holbrooke later wrote. "I was at the center of the world, right where I wanted to be. I had wanted to see war, like Stephen Crane, and I had wanted to participate in history, and I was doing both."

In Ba Xuyen, Holbrooke distributed cement, cooking oil, and roofing thatch to villagers, built schools, helped train and arm the militias of the local strategic hamlets, and wrangled with the disagreeable Vietnamese province chief. The term of that era for this kind of wartime aid effort was "pacification"; today it's "nation-building," and it reflects the idea that, in a counter-insurgency, the main battle is for the allegiance of the population. "Changing hearts and minds—all the smart young men thought that," Gelb recalled. "That became sort of a telltale belief of my generation." Four decades later, after strategic bungling in Iraq and Afghanistan, the smart young men discovered it again.

Holbrooke didn't question the need to fight Communism in South Vietnam. But, he said, because he was stationed in the countryside, where the war was being fought, he realized early on that "we weren't being honest with ourselves. . . . I saw the credibility gap." The pessimistic dispatches of David Halberstam and other journalists depicted the war more accurately than the memos and cables passing through official channels. In 1964, Holbrooke became a staff assistant at the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. ("Richard is hardly the sort who's going to get isolated in a provincial assignment," Wisner said.) Holbrooke shared his contrary views with his superiors, including Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. On a flight back to Saigon from the field with Lodge, he argued that the tactic of creating "free-fire zones," in which anything that moved could be killed, only embittered the Vietnamese and created more Vietcong. Holbrooke successfully mixed candor and careerism, rising through the Embassy's hierarchy by seeking out powerful patrons, impressing them with his intelligence, and making no secret of his critical viewpoint (while concealing the disdain he felt for a few of them).

In 1966, Holbrooke was called back to Washington and placed under a special assistant to President Lyndon Johnson, Robert Komer, whose office was taking control of all the pacification programs in Vietnam. Komer was such a brutal bureaucratic fighter that Lodge nicknamed him the Blowtorch. Holbrooke, whose nickname later became the Bulldozer, grew even more brash. After a trip to South Vietnam in late 1966, Holbrooke wrote Komer a memo, reporting, "I have never seen the Americans in such disarray."

Komer's new office represented a turn toward more intelligent counter-insurgency, and it helped check the Vietcong's recruiting efforts; but it came late, and it was undermined by the American strategy of big-unit ground combat, and by the hollowness of the South Vietnamese government. Anthony Lake, the diplomat, was Holbrooke's colleague and close friend in those years. (Their friendship, always competitive, eventually curdled.) Lake said that pacification had backfired by "focussing on programs at the expense of local politics": "The more we did with the programs, the more we were undercutting the credibility and even legitimacy of the Saigon government."

Holbrooke began losing faith in the war. He told me, "The most senior people in the U.S. government—the best and the brightest, if you will—were deluding themselves." In early 1967, Nicholas Katzenbach, Rusk's deputy at the State Department, hired Holbrooke. "I was a sucker for Richard," Katzenbach, who is now eighty-seven, told me. "He never had any hesitation in giving his own opinion, which I think he regarded as superior to yours." Every Thursday afternoon, Katzenbach convened senior officials for an informal discussion of Vietnam. Because the meeting had no official status and produced no paper trail—the point was a candid conversation, over drinks—Katzenbach called the gathering the Non-Group. Holbrooke was desperate to attend. "He pestered me, to the point I couldn't stand it any longer," Katzenbach said. At the Non-Group, Holbrooke met leading figures of the establishment—Ambassador Averell Harriman; Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara; his deputy, Cyrus Vance—all of whom became his benefactors.

In November, 1967, Holbrooke drafted a remarkable seventeen-page memo to President Johnson, over Katzenbach's name. Without quite saying that the United States should withdraw, he argued that Hanoi was winning, not on the battlefield but in America:

> Hanoi uses time the way the Russians used terrain before Napoleon's advance on Moscow, always retreating, losing every battle, but eventually creating conditions in which the enemy can no longer function. For Napoleon it was his long supply lines and the cold Russian winter; Hanoi hopes that for us it will be the mounting dissension, impatience, and frustration caused by a protracted war without fronts or other visible signs of success; a growing need to choose between guns and butter; and an increasing American repugnance at finding, for the first time, their own country cast as "the heavy."

Johnson had two choices. He could escalate the war in an attempt to strike a decisive blow against North Vietnam—an unlikely outcome. Or he could accept the impossibility of defeating the Communists in South Vietnam, and try instead to reduce civilian casualties, turn over more responsibility for fighting to the Vietnamese, pressure the government in Saigon to improve its performance, and seek an opening for negotiations. Holbrooke showed the memo to Katzenbach. "I was very reluctant to send it, because I knew Johnson would go up in smoke," Katzenbach said. "But I agreed with it, and so I sent it to Johnson." The President never acknowledged the memo.

In 1968, Holbrooke joined the American delegation at the peace talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris. "Holbrooke wants to always talk with the other side," Katzenbach said. "He always thinks there's some negotiation, some middle road. He always thinks

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Holbrooke arrived in Vietnam in 1963, and worked on the pacification effort in the Lower Mekong Delta.

he'll learn more than he'll give away." But the talks made no progress, and after the election of Richard Nixon that November, Holbrooke decamped to Princeton, becoming a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson School. He soon wrote Anthony Lake, who had joined the new Administration, with a detailed proposal for a ceasefire, American withdrawal, and power-sharing between Saigon and the Vietcong. "In any case, it is your problem again and not mine anymore," Holbrooke signed off, though he remained "always ready to tell you why the latest plan won't work."

Vietnam didn't haunt Holbrooke with lifelong self-reproach: he was too young to be crippled by the burden of responsibility, and a bias for action leaves the strain of tragedy out of his character. "He understands where he went awry in Vietnam, but he doesn't dwell on past errors," Gelb said. "He's looking for the next thing to do." Unlike other Democrats of the Vietnam era, Holbrooke did not rethink the fundamental role of American power and leadership in the world. "I'm informed by Vietnam," Holbrooke told me. "I'm not imprisoned by it."

In 1970, he became the Peace Corps director in Morocco. The next year, he visited Peace Corps operations in Afghanistan. The country left a lasting impression. He later said, "I saw this romantic, exotic, harmonious, multi-ethnic society, just a few years before it was destroyed."

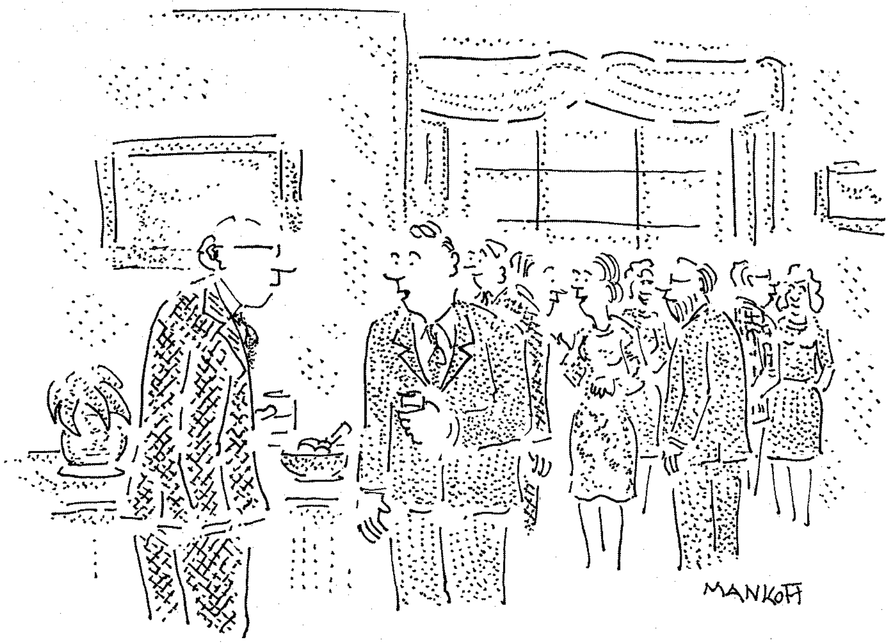
While running for President, Obama promised to shift America's focus from Iraq to the region where the September 11th attacks had actually been planned. This policy had enough merit to go almost uncontested during the campaign, but Obama's position was also inflected with political calculations. Morton Abramowitz, a veteran of the foreign-policy establishment, put it bluntly: "Obama, in a fit of absent-mindedness, to show he was tough, made Afghanistan his signature issue because he wanted to get out of Iraq. And this is going to be Goddamned difficult." Within weeks of taking office, Obama decided to approve the deployment to Afghanistan of seventeen thousand additional troops and four thousand trainers. He did so without having time to come up with a strategy for how they should be used. Meanwhile, the Taliban had taken control of a dozen districts in Afghanistan.

Bruce Riedel, a retired C.I.A. officer, told me that in January, on a trip to Afghanistan, Vice-President-elect Joe Biden discovered that U.S. policy was in disarray. When he asked why American troops were there, no two people gave him the same answer. Shortly after the Inauguration, Obama went to the Pentagon, where the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave a slide briefing; instead of delineating a clear goal, the briefing listed more than a dozen goals. Obama called Riedel and asked him to lead a two-month strategic review of the war. Holbrooke would work closely with him.

Riedel had studied the region for years, but the most recent intelligence gave new grounds for worry. "Al Qaeda is recruiting and training individuals with Western European passports in their camps in Pakistan," he said. "There's only one reason they're doing that"—attacks on the West. "They don't need guys with British and French passports to attack the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad." The Taliban leadership—the Quetta shura, led by Mullah Omar—not only still existed (though the Pakistanis denied it) but was meeting at the same time as Riedel's group. "They were doing *their* strategic review, probably with a lot less bureaucracy," Riedel said.

At the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, in Washington, the review group looked at an array of options, including an abandonment of counter-insurgency in Afghanistan and a very narrow focus on Al Qaeda. This "minimalist" view has been embraced by a diverse group of thinkers, including Rory Stewart, the British diplomat and writer, who runs a foundation in Kabul; the conservative columnist George F. Will; and Leslie Gelb, whose recent book, "Power Rules," argues for a reduced American commitment in Afghanistan, and recommends, among other things, threatening air strikes in order to deter the Taliban from allowing Al Qaeda back into the country. In this view, it's a dangerous illusion to think that America knows how to fight insurgents in the deserts and mountains of Afghanistan, and to believe that America can help build a viable Afghan state. Afghanistan is too tribal, too ancient, too recalcitrant to be shaped by foreigners; Americans, for their part, are ignorant of the complexities of foreign places and too entranced with their own ideas to understand whom they're dealing with. Let Afghanistan follow its own destiny, the minimalists argue, and use American power—Predator drones, Special Forces units, spies—to contain Al Qaeda.

In the review group, the proponent of a scaled-back policy was Biden, who



"Yes, living well is the best revenge, but right now I'd settle just for doing better than my brother-in-law."

consistently voiced skepticism, asking: Is there an alternative? "Biden was very courageous," Gelb, who knows him well, said. "It gave the Administration self-doubt."

A pure counterterror approach had, in fact, been the Bush Administration's policy for years: kill or capture terrorist leaders, with minimal support for political institutions in Kabul and Islamabad. It had created the mess that Obama inherited, with two countries under threat from insurgents and Al Qaeda's strength increasing. "Al Qaeda doesn't exist in a vacuum," Riedel said. "They're part of a syndicate of terrorist groups. Selective counterterrorism won't get you anywhere, because the bad guys don't stay in their lanes." And without an extensive military presence and connections to the Pakistani and Afghan governments the U.S. would likely lose the intelligence networks that have been built up since 9/11. Obama would have to accept the risk that Al Qaeda might pull off another catastrophic attack. The abandonment of Afghanistan to the Taliban would also be a dire prospect for Afghans, especially women, but in war-weary America this argument no longer had force. The basis for a policy had to be American self-interest.

As the strategic review continued, through February and March, support for the war kept slipping. Democrats had generally considered Afghanistan to be the "good war," as opposed to Iraq, but, once Obama was in office and the withdrawal from Iraq had begun, congressional leaders such as David Obey, of Wisconsin, announced that they would give the Administration twelve months to show progress in Afghanistan. This unrealistic time frame—which coincides with the run-up to the 2010 elections—was adopted by numerous Administration officials. By August, more than half of Americans, and seventy per cent of Democrats, had turned against the war. " 'Afghanistan is Vietnam and the graveyard of empires'—that chorus comes mainly from the President's supporters," Riedel said.

There were obvious similarities between Afghanistan and Vietnam: a rural insurgency, a weak and corrupt American ally, and an enemy sanctuary across the border. The differences were also worth noting: the Vietcong had a strong base of support in South Vietnam, while the Taliban were reviled across much of Afghanistan, and their popularity, confined to Pashtun areas, was based on tribal and ideological, not nationalistic, grounds. In the view of Holbrooke and the other members of Riedel's group, one difference was paramount: Vietnam had never posed a direct threat to the United States, but the Taliban, because of its alliance with terrorist networks, did. This argument won the day, and it set the Obama Administration on a course of escalation that would be difficult to undo. But a shadow hovered: a prolonged war had once destroyed a Democratic Administration. As Riedel put it, "Johnson sort of slid into an escalatory ladder, without any strategy for measuring the results."

On March 18th, Obama flew to Los Angeles, for an appearance on the "Tonight Show," and Rahm Emanuel, his chief of staff, arranged for Riedel to travel with the President and summarize the review. Obama spent an hour talking with him. The senior Administration official said that, in the last phase of the strategy review, "the President asked by far the hardest questions: If this doesn't work, then what?" Unlike Johnson, Obama wanted a serious internal debate about his policy, and he got one, with advisers considering whether the war was already lost. Yet the conclusion was, in a sense, foreordained by the President's campaign promises. Intellectual honesty in the private councils of the White House told you something about the calibre of the officials involved, but in the realm of public policy it made little difference.

On March 27th, the Administration rolled out its new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Obama, in a speech, reminded the country that Al Qaeda was still trying to attack America. "I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focussed goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan," he said. This rationale represented a return to basics, a dispensing with illusions about transforming other people's societies. It sounded tough-minded, and it offered Americans a simple and self-interested reason for their young people to risk death in remote places. But the implications were broad. By the end of his speech, Obama had promised to support women's rights, to send lawyers and agricultural experts to Afghanistan to reform its government and economy, and to offer seven and a half billion dollars in new aid for schools, roads, and democracy in Pakistan. He also said that the Administration would establish benchmarks for measuring progress. Last week, around fifty of them were finally released to Congress.

The new strategy meant different things to different audiences. According to Shuja Nawaz, an analyst of the Pakistani military, the aid package was seen in Pakistan as a sign of American support, while in Afghanistan the Obama strategy, with its talk of lowered expectations for Afghan democracy, raised fears of reduced commitment. On May 30th, Morton Abramowitz ran into Holbrooke at a memorial service. "There's a long-term problem," Abramowitz told him. "It's going to take a lot of money, a lot of effort. And the Administration, in order to get the money, has to convey there's a short-term fix. But there is no short-term fix." John Kerry, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, told me, "Everyone's on a relatively short fuse here to see that the strategy is being defined correctly." He expressed concern that the Administration's strategy "demands greater nation-building resources than people may be aware and certainly than we have thus far committed." James Dobbins, now with the RAND Corporation, couches the problem this way: "There is a gap between the reason we're there and what we're doing. The rationale is counterterrorism. The strategy is counter-insurgency."

I asked Holbrooke about the conflicting thrusts of Obama's speech. "Read it carefully," he said. "The President put the stress on Al Qaeda because that's the reason we're there, and that's the core difference between Iraq and Vietnam, on the one hand, and Afghanistan, on the other. But he never said anything about leaving Afghanistan on a specified timetable. Our goal has got to be to get combat troops out eventually. There's only one way to do that, and that's to build up Afghan capability, and get the Pakistanis to coöperate more. But any correct policy toward Afghanistan involves extended economic assistance."

Holbrooke assembled his team in the idiosyncratic manner of the "Ocean's Eleven" heist movies. In early December, 2008, Vali Nasr, an Iranian-American scholar of the Muslim world, especially Pakistan, received a text message from Holbrooke around midnight, wondering if Nasr was awake. When Nasr called back, Holbrooke told him that his new special-representative role was going to be mentioned in the Washington *Post* the next day. "I don't want you to accept any job in the government without letting me make a counteroffer," Holbrooke said. "Don't tell anyone except your wife," he told Nasr. Holbrooke also called Barnett Rubin, of New York University, perhaps the country's leading expert on Afghanistan, who was in North Carolina, preparing to give a talk to the 82nd Airborne Division before it deployed. Holbrooke locked him in as well.

In early February, Steve Berk, an official with the Department of Agriculture, was reading the *Times* at his house, in Palm Beach County, Florida, when he noticed an article about Holbrooke's new assignment, alongside a picture from 2006: Holbrooke and his wife, Kati Marton, an author and a human-rights activist, perched atop a rusting Soviet tank in the Afghan city of Herat. Berk, who had worked briefly in Afghanistan, wrote an e-mail to Holbrooke with some ideas for agriculture in Afghanistan, expecting no answer. Within a few days, he had an interview scheduled. Holbrooke, who knew little about agriculture other than that it was an essential but neglected area in Afghanistan, pummelled Berk with questions, then offered him a job. "I'm really proud of you," Holbrooke later told him. "You did exactly what a government official should do—you barged in the door and found exactly the right person."

One night in April, Holbrooke was on the last Delta shuttle from Washington to New York when Rina Amiri recognized him. An Afghan-American woman in her thirties, Amiri came from a royalist family in Kabul that had fled to America when the Afghan king Zahir Shah was overthrown, in 1973; since 2001, she had been working in Afghanistan on political and human-rights issues, for the U.N. and then the Open Society Institute. Amiri sat in the row behind Holbrooke and pressed him about a constitutional problem related to the Afghan elections. After a few minutes, Holbrooke suddenly said, "You know, I'm building this team."

"I know," Amiri said. "But I'm here to lobby you."

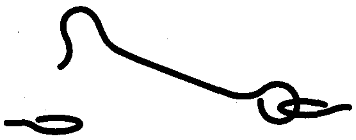
"I'm very efficient. I just turned your lobbying into a job interview." Holbrooke fixed her with a steady look. "Do you realize no one will offer you the type of opportunity I'm offering to affect your country?"

She asked him for more specifics. "You will have a lot of latitude," he said. "That's the way I work."

Amiri was wary of losing her independence. She also worried about Holbrooke's reputation for abrasiveness. Would she be in a meeting in Kabul where her American boss pounded his fist on the table? It took a month, but eventually Holbrooke won her over, hiring her as an Afghanistan expert. (Henry Kissinger once said, "If Richard calls you and asks you for something, just say yes. If you say no, you'll eventually get to yes, but the journey will be very painful.")

Holbrooke has taken over two suites of offices at State Department headquarters, filling them with a staff that has grown to some thirty people. (He had told Clinton that he would need around fifteen.) Nine government agencies, including the C.I.A., the F.B.I., the Defense and Treasury Departments, and two foreign countries, Britain and Canada, are represented in the office. The Af-Pak suites are treasuries of Holbrookeana: photographs of him with Bill Clinton and Kofi Annan, in East Timor; with George and Barbara Bush, in Washington; with Slobodan Milosevic and Warren Christopher, in Dayton. There is a large image of Holbrooke leaving a building in Sarajevo, alongside a guard with an automatic rifle; a framed op-ed eulogizing Dean Rusk; a letter from Richard Nixon; multiple copies of his book "To End a War." These furnishings are both a monument to himself and an attempt to infuse the staff with a sense of historical purpose. Anyone who works for Holbrooke can walk into his office. When Petraeus visited, he said, "This is the flattest organization I've ever seen." Members of the staff compare it to a startup company.

Vikram Singh, a young counter-insurgency expert who accompanied Holbrooke on a trip to the region and ended up working for him, said, "He is a tough boss. I rarely go home before nine or ten. You've got to be there and available all the time, and you have hell to pay when



A SPEECH TO THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA

(With thanks to Wes Jackson and in memory of Sir Albert Howard and Stan Rowe.)

Thank you. I'm glad to know we're friends, of course;
There are so many outcomes that are worse.
But I must add I'm sorry for getting here
By a sustained explosion through the air,
Burning the world in fact to rise much higher
Than we should go. The world may end in fire
As prophesied—*our* world! We speak of it
As "fuel" while we burn it in our fit
Of temporary progress, digging up
An antique dark-held luster to corrupt
The present light with smokes and smudges, poison
To outlast time and shatter comprehension.
Burning the world to live in it is wrong,
As wrong as to make war to get along
And be at peace, to falsify the land
By sciences of greed, or by demand
For food that's fast or cheap to falsify
The body's health and pleasure—don't ask why.
But why not play it cool? Why not survive

By Nature's laws that still keep us alive?
Let us enlighten, then, our earthly burdens
By going back to school, this time in gardens
That burn no hotter than the summer day.
By birth and growth, ripeness, death and decay,
By goods that bind us to all living things,
Life of our life, the garden lives and sings.
The Wheel of Life, delight, the fact of wonder,
Contemporary light, work, sweat, and hunger
Bring food to table, food to cellar shelves.
A creature of the surface, like ourselves,
The garden lives by the immortal Wheel
That turns in place, year after year, to heal
It whole. Unlike our economic pyre
That draws from ancient rock a fossil fire,
An anti-life of radiance and fume
That burns as power and remains as doom,
The garden delves no deeper than its roots
And lifts no higher than its leaves and fruits.

—*Wendell Berry*

you're not. He can be a pain, but he promotes his people."

Young officials who had heard stories about Holbrooke's temper and ego were surprised to find that he welcomed critical views, as long as they were well considered. He went out of his way to bring opposing viewpoints into his office. Barnett Rubin, a part-time adviser, kept his position at New York University, which allows him more flexibility than Holbrooke's other aides. In his role as an academic, he can explore the possibility of negotiations with Taliban leaders, although official American policy is to reconcile only with insurgents who have already laid down their arms and accepted political participation. Rubin has written that even the best counter-insurgency cannot win the war. Instead, he argues, there should be an international effort to give Pakistan security guarantees; then its military could be encouraged to push Taliban leaders to make a deal with the Afghan government, thus giving America a way out. If Rubin serves as a kind of in-house dissident, Holbrooke's other Afghanistan expert, Amiri, regards any deal that would lead to power-sharing with hard-line elements in the Taliban leadership as a betrayal of the Afghan people. Holbrooke wants both points of view on his staff.

"You have to test your hypothesis against other theories," Holbrooke said. "Certainty in the face of complex situations is very dangerous." During Vietnam, he had seen officials such as McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's and Johnson's national-security adviser, "cut people to ribbons because the views they were getting weren't acceptable." Washington promotes tactical brilliance framed by strategic conformity—the facility to outmaneuver one's counterpart in a discussion, without questioning fundamental assumptions. A more farsighted wisdom is often unwelcome. In 1975, with Bundy in mind, Holbrooke published an essay in *Harper's* in which he wrote, "The smartest man in the room is not always right." That was one of the lessons of Vietnam. Holbrooke described his method to me as "a form of democratic centralism, where you want open airing of views and opinions and suggestions upward, but once the policy's decided you want rigorous, disciplined implementation of it. And very often in the government the exact opposite happens. People sit in a room, they don't air their real differences, a false and sloppy consensus papers over those underlying differences, and they go back to their offices and continue to work at cross-purposes, even actively undermining each other."

Holbrooke's team was moving so fast that the National Security Council was months behind him in assembling its own offices related to Afghanistan and Pakistan. To keep the rest of the government informed, and to avoid turf battles, in June Holbrooke and Lieutenant General Doug Lute, the President's adviser on Afghanistan and Pakistan, started a weekly Monday-evening meeting at the State Department for all the relevant agencies. Lute called it the "shura." With Holbrooke at the helm, it had the freewheeling quality of Katzenbach's Non-Group.

In addition to setting up his office, Holbrooke had a number of important relationships to nurture. There was Petraeus, whom he had not known until Hillary Clinton introduced them. There was Clinton herself, with whom he often spoke. (Clinton told me that the Administration was "coördinating our diplomatic and development and defense efforts much more closely than they were before.") There was Congress. And there was the President, who wanted updates on Afghanistan and Pakistan every day.

Within a few weeks of Obama's speech on the new policy, Pakistan's condition suddenly slipped from worrying to alarming. Under Musharraf, the military had struck deals giving Islamist militants de-facto control over many of the semi-autonomous tribal areas along the Afghan border. In 2007, under the mantle of the Pakistani Taliban, the militants spread into the settled districts of the North-West Frontier Province, terrorizing residents of the Swat Valley—beheading policemen, shutting down girls' schools—until Musharraf's successor as President, the civilian Asif Zardari, agreed, in February, to give the Taliban control over Swat.

On April 21st, Taliban fighters in Swat began attacking government outposts in the neighboring district of Buner, which put them within an hour's drive of Islamabad. The Pakistani government appeared to be paralyzed by the threat, and Washington was thrown into a panic. Most of the strategic review had been focussed on Afghanistan; Pakistan had been discussed mainly as a sanctuary for the Taliban and as a potential recipient of substantial aid. There was no detailed strategy for keeping the Pakistani state intact.

The next morning at the daily staff meeting, Holbrooke expressed concern about the Taliban incursions into Buner. It was Vali Nasr's first day of work—security clearances are protracted matters in Washington—and Holbrooke asked for his opinion. "The Taliban are not going to march into Islamabad," Nasr said. More worrisome was the Pakistani government's decision to give up on Swat.

Holbrooke and his staff discussed the dire condition of the Pakistani state. It had great difficulty delivering services and was threatened by collapse from within: its civilian politicians sniping at each other, its government and military at odds. The Taliban was not going to take over Karachi and Lahore, but its advance might cause a chain reaction of violence and jihadism that could plunge Pakistan into chaos. The U.S. had to stiffen Pakistan's will to fight the Taliban, and it had to help prevent the country from disintegrating. The feud between President Zardari and the opposition leader, Nawaz Sharif, needed to be resolved. The issue was governance, not just extremism.

After the meeting, Holbrooke told Nasr, "Write a memo."

"By when?"

"Late tonight." Holbrooke had a meeting scheduled for four the next afternoon with Obama and Clinton, at the White House. At 3:45 P.M., he gave copies of Nasr's four-page memo to Clinton and Tom Donilon, the deputy national-security adviser, and Clinton read it while they were standing outside the Oval Office. When they went in, Clinton gave copies to Obama and other senior officials.

The President skimmed the memo. "I agree with Vali Nasr," he said.

Holbrooke texted Nasr at midnight. "What a first day!" he wrote. There was a part of Holbrooke that stood aside from the events in which he was participating and saw them in their larger context, as if he were writing the drama with the aid of hindsight and historical analogy. ("He's romantic about a lot of things," Nicholas Katzenbach said. "That includes himself.") Once, during a siege in Bosnia, when French peacekeepers were calling for more helicopters, Holbrooke told the journalist Joe Klein, "This is exactly like Dien Bien Phu!"—the site of the French defeat in Vietnam, in 1954. A few months ago, he mentioned to me a *Times* article about a Taliban ambush in a poppy field in southern Afghanistan and, recalling a notorious Vietcong victory in the Mekong Delta, exclaimed, "It's just like Ap Bac!" He often urged his younger aides to remember everything, because nothing they did in the future would ever be this exciting. "One day, you'll write about this," he told Nasr. "I can't promise you every day your memo will go to the President, but today it did."

During the following months, Holbrooke spent a lot of time urging Nawaz Sharif to form a coalition government with Zardari. Along with Petraeus and Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Holbrooke pressured General Ashfaq Kayani, the head of the Pakistani Army, to push back against the Taliban in Swat; in May, when the military's operations displaced more than two million people from their homes, Holbrooke and Clinton procured several hundred million dollars in emergency aid. If the refugees were not able to return home soon and safely, Holbrooke believed, they could become another threat to Pakistan's stability. In June, Holbrooke visited a sweltering camp in the flatlands south of Swat, and the event won praise from the ordinarily anti-American local media, which pointed out that no senior Pakistani leader had yet done the same.

One day in June, I sat down with Nasr in the State Department cafeteria. "Pakistan has become the eye of the storm, and I don't think the American public understands this," he said. Washington's focus on terrorists in the border areas had neglected the deeper problem. The Pakistani military was now fighting the Pakistani Taliban in Swat, but it was still making distinctions among extremists—maintaining support for the Afghan Taliban and jihadist groups in Punjab. Underlying the crisis was an unhappy history with the United States: on the Pakistani side, a sense of being exploited for American strategic goals; on the American side, a sense of being chronically deceived.

"Richard gets it," Nasr said. "He knows where we are with Pakistan is a symptom of twenty years of neglect. It's a symptom of two countries that aren't enemies but don't trust each other." Pakistan was counting on something that Hafez Assad, of Syria, once said: "America is short of breath." Eventually, the Americans would leave Afghanistan, allowing Pakistan to pursue its own interests in the region. "Countries don't change their strategic vision overnight," Nasr told me. "It's not as simple as Bush saying, 'I hate terrorism, you hate terrorism, we're all on the same page.' This is a long, hard battle. We need to turn the Pakistani military, but we can't do that without getting it to see its interests differently, which means building relations."

In late July, I travelled with Holbrooke and a dozen members of his staff to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Holbrooke visits the region at least every other month; it requires repeated persuasion to bring the policies of two foreign governments that dislike each other into closer alignment with American interests. Holbrooke's assignment, it was becoming clear, carried overlapping echoes from American history and from his own. He was running an interagency effort supporting a counter-insurgency, as his old boss Robert Komer had in Vietnam. He was mapping out a new vision for American interests in a volatile region, as his old friend Henry Kissinger had done in Southeast Asia. And he was positioning himself to be a mediator in an international conflict, as he had done in the Balkans. (Holbrooke might have sworn not to use the "K-word," but he was going to India almost as often as he was going to the two other countries.) What I didn't understand was how these roles came together, and, beyond that, what overarching strategy Holbrooke thought was required for him to succeed.

We flew in an Air National Guard 737; Holbrooke had his own curtained-off compartment. Somewhere over the Atlantic, he emerged barefoot in yellow pajamas and, doing knee bends in the aisle, held an informal staff meeting. He looked tired—he complained of exhaustion throughout the trip—and yet he hummed with energy. Holbrooke handed a memo to Vikram Singh. The memo, written by another aide, was a plan for transferring more authority from NATO's provincial

Holbrooke in Ghazni, Afghanistan, last July. He visits the region at least every other month. Photograph by Marco Di Lauro.

reconstruction teams to Afghans. "Just get it into an action-plan form," Holbrooke said. "See my notes."

"You want something for the President by Thursday?" Singh asked.

"I'm not sure," Holbrooke said. "It's a lovely work. But it doesn't go far enough—develop this more." He pointed at the memo, on which he had scribbled "NOT OFTEN ENOUGH!," "NOT *GOOD ENOUGH*," and "YES!" He said, "This part is bullshit—we're not going to do it." And "Change words like 'sometimes,' which means 'never.' "

The memo's theme was one of Holbrooke's obsessions: how to increase American involvement without reducing Afghan capacity. His answer was to channel resources through the Afghan ministries, rather than allowing aid money to be siphoned off by foreign contractors. Holbrooke was now vetting U.S. aid contracts for Afghanistan. But, in the absence of any meaningful government in most of Afghanistan's provinces, there was always a temptation to do things faster and better by going around the Afghans. " 'The dependency track,' " he read aloud, explaining, "The more help they need, the more dependent they get for their help, and then it's 'Ah, let the Americans do that.' In Vietnam that's exactly what happened."

The conversation turned to Pakistan. Holbrooke lamented the flight of educated Pakistanis to the United States. "That's why Hillary's big idea of tapping the diaspora is so important," he said. Clinton had urged Pakistani-American doctors, especially women, to volunteer in the refugee areas. "We can't do it for them."

That week, an electricity crisis was sparking riots in Pakistan. "If you could turn the lights on a few more hours a day, it would increase public good will," Nasr said.

"The first short story in the book I'm reading, the central figure is an electrician," Holbrooke said. "I have to read you one paragraph from the beginning." He retreated to his compartment and returned with a copy of "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders," by the Pakistani writer Daniyal Mueenuddin. He read aloud from the first page, and then said, "I gave a copy to the President. I don't know if he's read it. It's beautiful."

Business got done, but mainly Holbrooke held forth, admitting his young staff into his store of knowledge. He had told me, "The people born in the late thirties and forties are pretty much running out of time." He was talking about himself and his peers. "This group on the plane are emblematic of the next generation. They aren't shaped by the Vietnam War, which is centrally important. They aren't either informed or encumbered by it. Vietnam is as far away from them as World War I was from me. I'm afraid they're going to come out of my office and say, 'Oh, Jesus, more war stories from World War I.' " He went on, "The World War II generation believed the United States could do anything—anything. . . . And Vietnam was a shattering experience for everyone. But these guys weren't even born, or they were in diapers. That was forty years ago. I really hate to talk about Vietnam. I don't think about it every day."

Later, I asked Singh if Vietnam came

REPORTAGE BY GETTY IMAGES

up often. “He’s not going to be trapped by his Vietnam ghosts,” Singh said. “But he’s going to think about the parallels in proactive, forward-thinking ways. And it’s incredibly powerful.”

Islamabad felt like a capital under siege. We were driven at night from the airport to a barricaded hotel in a convoy of S.U.V.s that wove in and out of single file in evasive maneuvers, along broad avenues that had been cleared in advance and were lined with soldiers and police. Holbrooke disappeared for hours into secretive talks in government offices, always emerging with the banal news that the talks had been “productive,” even when his aides told me that they had not.

One evening, we went to President House, a floodlit Bauhaus-style structure, which had been built by the military dictator Zia ul-Haq in the nineteen-eighties. The reception room was guarded by ceremonial soldiers standing at rigid attention in traditional turbans topped with fans of starched black cotton. After a few minutes, the President entered: a short, smiling, dumpy man with a thin mustache, in a dark-blue suit and a pink tie. As Holbrooke introduced Asif Zardari to his staff, the President kept making quips, like a nervous night-club comedian.

“You’ve lost weight,” he told Holbrooke. “What have you been doing?”

“All I do is work.”

“You were working in Italy? On the beaches?”

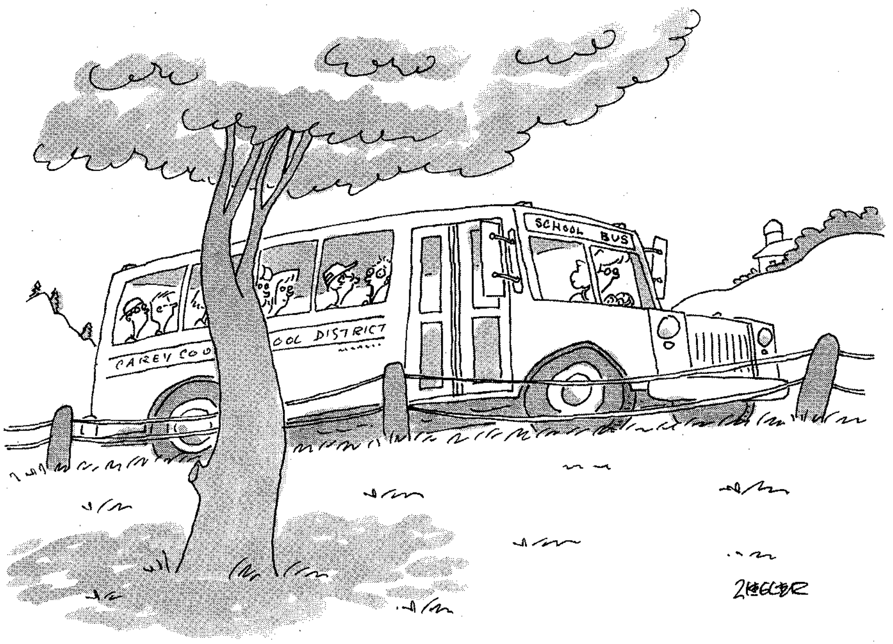
“I *was* in Italy,” Holbrooke admitted. “You’re very well informed.” He observed that, with each of his visits, Pakistan seemed to have improved a little more.

“It’s the karma,” Zardari said. “You bring good stars to us. We believe in that, we Eastern people.”

Allowed one question, I asked Zardari if Pakistan’s main security threat was the Taliban or India, and, if it was India, how Holbrooke could help if he couldn’t address Kashmir. Zardari gave a tortured answer that invoked the Great Game—the nineteenth-century contest between Britain and Russia for control of Central Asia—and midway through he lost the thread. “Maybe if we hadn’t been a buffer state we’d have escaped this security mind-set,” he concluded. “Ambassador Holbrooke can help us move from the extreme mind-set to a civilized discussion with the world.”

Later, Holbrooke told me, vaguely, that his meetings with other Pakistani leaders—especially those with General Ashfaq Kayani, the military chief, and General Ahmad Pasha, the head of Pakistan’s intelligence agency—had centered on “the refugees, and the strategic challenge of dealing with Afghanistan, whether they’re going to consolidate Swat or move on to Waziristan.” Pakistani operations in Waziristan, the heartland of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, were apparently on hold.

Holbrooke expressed satisfaction that the Pakistani military was finally taking on homegrown militants in Swat. But it wasn’t at all clear that the generals’ world view had changed. They still allowed the Afghan Taliban to use Pakistan as a sanctuary, apparently in the hope that the insurgents would counteract a growing Indian influence in Afghanistan. “The Pakistanis are scared that this is some kind of sandwich India wants to make of Pakistan,” Shuja Nawaz, the military analyst, said. “The Pakistanis don’t want an unfriendly Pashtun government in Kabul.” A Western diplomat who had spent most of the past decade in Kabul said that Pakistan’s military leaders “are actively engaged in the double game . . . enabling and facilitating a Taliban-led insurgency into Afghanistan.”



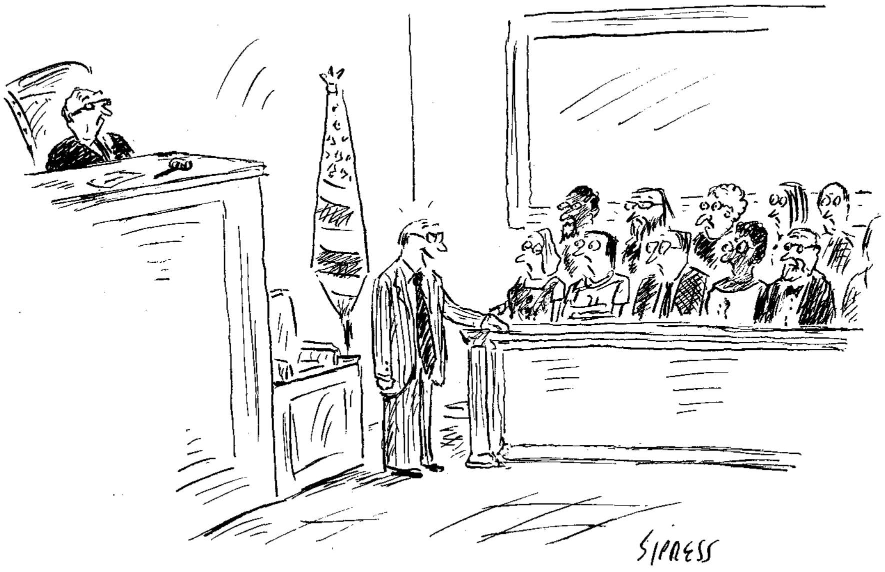
“I turned five. That’s why I’m here. What are you in for?”

I asked Holbrooke if he ever got into disagreements with the Pakistanis about intelligence. “Sometimes they just flatly tell us we don’t have the right information,” he said. Even when he knew it was true? “Sometimes.” He thought for a moment. “The relationship with Pakistan is so fraught with a history of disappointment on both sides. . . . We can’t align our interests exactly, because they live in a different space, and their history is defined by their relationship with India. . . . The one thing I believe we can do with Pakistan is to try to reach a strategically symmetrical view on the danger posed by Al Qaeda and its allies. That’s the proximate strategic goal.”

I pointed out that Pakistan’s support for the Afghan Taliban suggested that even this goal would remain elusive. “Sometimes we part ways, sometimes we’re allied,” Holbrooke said. “It’s not so clear. This theory that they’re the sole sponsor of the Taliban is just as overstated as the theory that we have a total symmetry.” He added, “On the other hand, their own Army information chief said the other day they have continuing contacts.”

Shuja Nawaz said, “Richard Holbrooke can be a tough negotiator in a closed-door session with the Pakistanis and get a lot done. But if you do it in public the doors close.” Just before Holbrooke travelled to Pakistan in April, he and Mike Mullen publicly alluded to ties between Pakistani intelligence and the Afghan Taliban, and the generals reacted with extreme displeasure. Nawaz pronounced it “probably the worst-ever visit by an American team,” adding, “It was a complete disaster." Since then, Holbrooke has been more careful, and some people in Kabul fear that he is in danger of becoming the latest American official to fall for Pakistani assurances. Saad Mohseni, the founder of Afghanistan's largest media group, and a friend of Holbrooke's, said, "I think he overestimates what he can do with the Pakistanis. The Pakistanis have played hardball with the best, and Holbrooke's got his match there."

In 1995, Christopher Hill spent months watching Holbrooke negotiate over Bosnia. "He keeps you off balance. He doesn't show his cards. He makes you think you have to do the deal with him, but that he might not be able to sell it to the other side. He uses humor. He gets this dyspeptic look on his face so that they have to ask him, 'What is it?,' and he'll say, 'I'm worried. I don't know if it's going to work.' He uses all these performance acts to achieve his goals." In March, to coax Zardari into ending his feud with Sharif, Holbrooke warned that Congress might ignore the Administration's pleas and refuse to increase aid. But that was as far as he could go. There was no deal to strike with the Pakistanis, only trust to build, and Holbrooke's outsized personality seemed to be under wraps. In moments when I overheard him talking to Pakistani leaders, he took the solicitous tone of someone reassuring an unstable friend. "It's like dealing with psychologically abused children," a member of his staff said. "You don't focus on the screaming and violence—you just hug them tighter."



"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury duty . . ."

At a dinner party in Islamabad, I met a thirty-year-old businessman who told me that, as the head of a family with a huge following of religious mystics, he effectively controls up to eight hundred thousand votes. Beneath Pakistan's dysfunctional government lies a social system that, in rural areas, remains feudal. The Taliban in Swat and the militant groups in Punjab have exploited the grievances of Pakistan's rural poor, promising them land and justice. At an official reception in Islamabad, I chatted with an elegant young member of the Senate who had an Ivy League education, and who was being groomed as a diplomat; that day in her district, where her family was one of the largest landowners, her constituents were rioting and burning railroad cars because of the electricity shortage. At such moments, it's tempting to think that if Pakistan were Russia the year would be 1910.

Part of Holbrooke's mission in Islamabad was to talk to ordinary Pakistanis, to try to disinfect the air of growing anti-Americanism and convey a message of genuine concern. Holbrooke gave numerous interviews to local journalists and television anchors, providing blunt but not unfriendly answers to often hostile questions, and eventually winning a grudging respect. At the hotel, he had breakfast with a group of refugees who had fled to Islamabad from Swat. Among them were the owner of an anti-Taliban radio station, a women's activist who had distributed a video of a young Pakistani woman being flogged by militants, and the director of a girls' school that had been shut down by the Taliban. Some of Holbrooke's guests expressed as much suspicion of the military—whose operations in Swat had destroyed livelihoods without killing any top Taliban leaders—as of the extremists. None of them thought it was safe to go home.

Holbrooke spent an intense hour listening to their stories and asking sympathetic questions. "I know it's dangerous—good luck to you," he told them at the end. "It's very hard for me to give you easy answers." He added, "We're your friends, we're your allies. What discourages me most is that so many Pakistanis think the United States is responsible for your problems."

All along the Mall, one of Lahore's main thoroughfares, stand monuments in red granite from the British Raj: the post office, a museum, administrative buildings, Punjab University. Since 9/11, America has spent $15.4 billion in Pakistan. Yet Ahmed Rashid, one of Pakistan's leading journalists, told me, "There is not a single monument to American aid in Pakistan. There is not a school, there is not a hospital, there is not a road, there is not a dam, there is not a new seed, a new crop. There is not a single mark. Have you set up even one teachers' training college for women? In my conversations with Holbrooke, I said, 'You've got to leave monuments. You've got to do one or two really big things.' " Rashid suggested teacher training, agricultural research, and hydroelectric projects. He thought that Holbrooke was hungry for new ideas, and liked that he could "bang heads," which was necessary in this part of the world. But, Rashid said, "Holbrooke had no idea what he'd walked into."

In Islamabad, it became clear how few levers Holbrooke had at his disposal. Many of the subjects central to U.S.-Pakistan relations—drones, the Afghan Taliban, Kashmir—were off limits to public discussion. Even the seven and a half billion dollars in aid over five years that is awaiting approval by Congress falls far short of what Holbrooke once estimated as Pakistan's actual need: fifty billion dollars. Because of Pakistan's sensitivity about its sovereignty, he had been unable to persuade its military to allow American helicopters to bring aid to the refugees. Holbrooke hadn't even been able to get the Pakistani military to help free the captured American journalist David Rohde, who, before escaping, in June, had been held by militants with connections to Pakistani intelligence. Fourteen years ago, when Rohde was taken prisoner by Serbian militiamen, in Bosnia, Holbrooke had made his release a condition of the Dayton talks, and Milosevic had complied.

Holbrooke was denied the tools required to hammer out a grand bargain for the region: for example, an agreement in which Pakistan stopped offering sanctuary to the Afghan Taliban in exchange for a deal with India over Kashmir. Instead, according to Vali Nasr, Holbrooke had to "claw his way up by addressing other issues," such as the threat to Pakistan from homegrown extremism. He would have to try to change Pakistan's perception of its own interests indirectly. Nasr called it "remote-control nation-building."

When we flew over the Hindu Kush and landed in the mud-colored sprawl of Kabul, Holbrooke's longtime chief of staff, Rosemarie Pauli, said, "It always reminds me of Sarajevo." All around the airport were signs—uniforms, armored vehicles—of a heavy military presence. In Afghanistan, the atmosphere of the trip changed: Holbrooke switched his suit for a pink checked shirt, khakis, sunglasses, and a U.S.A.I.D. baseball cap, and he was greeted at each destination by American officers and civilian officials. He seemed less like a visiting emissary than like a proconsul inspecting a vast operation over which he commanded much of the authority.

For two days, we flew, by C-130 transport plane and Black Hawk helicopter, around the southern provinces, where an otherworldly heat rose from the desert and reports of intense fighting met us at every stop. The ruggedness of travel in Afghanistan and the proximity of the war energized Holbrooke. At briefings in each province, he asked questions that showed an astonishing grasp of detail.

In Helmand, American marines had just arrived, and they and British troops found themselves in bloody combat with Taliban cells. The provincial capital, Lashkar Gah, had been built with American assistance under Truman and Eisenhower, and we drove past a derelict movie theatre and an abandoned building that had once housed U.S.A.I.D. Holbrooke met with the governor, Gulab Mangal, and they discussed whether the price of this year's wheat harvest would be high enough to dissuade farmers from planting poppies. Just before our arrival, British troops had found and burned a cache of three hundred tons of opium in Helmand. To Holbrooke, it proved the wisdom of the Administration's policy of concentrating on drug dealers instead of crop eradication.

"Why do people join the Taliban?" Holbrooke asked Mangal. (It was a question that he asked everywhere he went.)

"Lack of knowledge, religious inspiration, lack of jobs, poverty," the Governor said. "Others, because of our wrong practices. And a large number because of pressure—because they will be killed."

"Do you have a program for those who want to leave the Taliban and come back to the government?"

The Governor said he had discussed the subject that morning with elders in one of the districts. "But will they get jobs?" Holbrooke pressed. "The last program didn't work very well."

The final stop on Holbrooke's tour was Ghazni Province, south of Kabul. Polish battalions were stationed there, and, like other NATO allies in Helmand and Kandahar, the Poles found that support from the Afghan Army was woefully lacking; the police were barely present. Holbrooke, who had kept harping on the need to transfer responsibility to the Afghans, was appalled. "We can keep doing this for a while, but sooner or later we'll turn it over to the Afghans," he said. "I've seen this problem in many countries around the world, but I have never seen it at this level, outside of places like Angola and Kosovo."

That day, Holbrooke and Karl Eikenberry, the U.S. Ambassador, met with the governor of Ghazni, Usman Usmani—a Karzai crony and an associate of the President's brother, Ahmed Wali, who is believed to have got fabulously rich off the drug trade. Security in Ghazni had deteriorated sharply, but Usmani offered a portrait of the local insurgency which placed the blame entirely on Pakistanis, Chechens, and Arabs. Holbrooke didn't bother to comment. Instead, he asked how many registered voters in the province would be unable to vote in the Presidential election, on August 20th, because of surging Taliban violence.

"Not more than one hundred thousand," the Governor said. "Five or ten per cent."

"There are one million people in Ghazni, right?" Holbrooke said. "Some of them are too young to vote. So it must be at least twenty per cent! It's a lot more than ten per cent, Governor. We have to be honest with each other. Let's deal with it, but let's start with facts."

The visit ended with a slide presentation on agriculture, by a colonel from the Texas National Guard. Holbrooke, who was planning to increase sixfold the number of agricultural advisers, stopped the colonel on a slide that showed a list of local projects. "Take No. 8, the Jaghatu Apiary Training Center," Holbrooke said. "We all use this phrase 'capacity-building.' But, I can assure you, a year ago we were not doing capacity-building. Only ten per cent of our aid went through the government here." The Texans' projects aided local farmers, he pointed out, but they were entirely separate from the Afghan government. The minister of agriculture, Asif Rahimi, was present, and Holbrooke said to him, "Mr. Minister, we want the people of Ghazni to think of your government as the place where they can go for services. Much as we love the Texas National Guard, they're not going to be here forever. Our goal here, under the new plan that Ambassador Eikenberry is overseeing, is to strengthen your government, not to do it ourselves. Otherwise"—he turned back to the colonel from Houston—"your apiary training will come and go like the wind. It'll be a memory. Yesterday we were in Lashkar Gah, which in the fifties was known as Little America, with American schools, American movie theatres, streets laid out like an American suburb. All gone."

In late May, I spent a few days with a U.S. Army unit in Wardak Province, southwest of Kabul. There had been rain, and the valleys between the brown mountains were green with apricot and apple orchards. Last year, Wardak—half an hour's drive from the capital—had almost fallen under Taliban control, and the highway that connects Kabul to Kandahar had been all but shut down, with dozens of produce trucks burned. Seven drivers were beheaded. There had been only a hundred and fifty American soldiers in a province of half a million people. This past February, fifteen hundred soldiers, originally scheduled to deploy to Iraq, arrived in Wardak, five months ahead of the additional troops authorized by Obama. They set up combat outposts in each district, up the road from the village bazaars. By May, the highway had become secure, and farmers could transport their goods to Kabul. A number of villagers said that they felt safer than a year ago, but shadowy armed men continued to intimidate anyone coöperating with the government. "Seven years of unfulfilled promises," an American battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Kimo Gallahue, said. "For the first time, we're doing counter-insurgency here." Another officer, Major Kit Parker, said, "If we can't get Wardak right, nothing else is going to fly."

The Americans in Wardak showed a sophistication about the fight which had come from repeated tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Counter-insurgency, which just three years ago was discussed by a handful of dissident Army officers and outside experts, is now the lingua franca of American combat units. They talked about "population security" and "governance" and "economic development," as if they were experts from an aid agency. They had learned enough to avoid using the term "Taliban," which oversimplified an enemy composed of disparate elements, including more criminals and unemployed youths than Islamist ideologues.

But these lessons had come very late. Sarah Chayes, a former reporter who founded a sustainable-development coöperative in Kandahar, and who is now an adviser to General Stanley McChrystal, the American commander in Afghanistan, told me, "What the Afghans expected of us was to help create a decent government. Instead, we gave them warlords, because we were focussed on counterterrorism." Zeroing in on killing the enemy, with grossly insufficient troops on the ground, had led directly to the overuse of air strikes and the killing of civilians.

Meanwhile, every time an Afghan encountered the government, he was hurt by it—abused, asked for a bribe, hauled off to jail without evidence. At least the Taliban offered justice; they heard disputes and delivered swift, if often brutal, verdicts, such as confinement in a box or death. As a result, the Taliban was regaining prestige. Insurgents collected taxes and even set up a commission to hear grievances against their fighters, something that neither the Afghan government nor NATO had done.

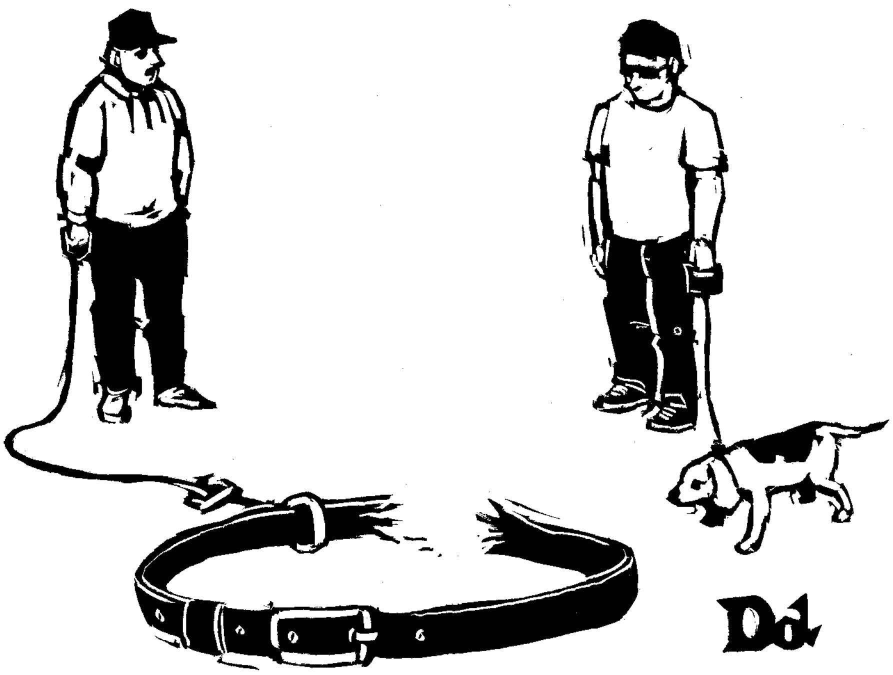
"The biggest complaint you hear from Afghan folks is there's no connection to the government," said Captain Jason Adler, a company commander in a district of Wardak called Sayed Abad, where there was still a fair amount of fighting. (The day I arrived at the combat outpost, the company was holding a memorial service for two sergeants who had just been killed in an ambush.) I walked down from the American base to the bazaar in the midday sun and sat with a dozen Afghan men gathered under a thatch shelter. Grievances began pouring out.

"If you go to government officials, they just put money in their pockets," a watermelon seller said. "They have their properties in Dubai—they don't care about the poor."

A mechanic, in a long, greasy shirt, said, "Most of our police, they're no good, they have drug problems. We want the police to take responsibility and bring peace for us. We don't want police who are there to take money." He got up to return to work. Most of the men under the shelter were jobless. These men had little affection for the Taliban, but they had almost no enthusiasm for the upcoming Presidential election, and no good words for any of the candidates, including President Karzai.

"Our government is all corrupt," an old man in a turban said. "We need a system to give more money to the poor. When the Taliban were in power, there was peace, there wasn't one gunshot at that time. They didn't help the poor, but there was peace. The last eight years, we've had nothing."

Holbrooke once told me that three things could cause America to lose the war: the Taliban sanctuary in Pakistan, civilian casualties, and corruption. The Afghan government was so crooked that NATO considered it as much of a threat to success as the Taliban. Members of Holbrooke's team heard that, after the election, Karzai might replace Governor Mangal, who had a reputation for being clean. They heard that the former police chief of Helmand, a notorious drug dealer, was one of Karzai's main fund-raisers. And they heard that Karzai's aides sometimes intervened to release a detainee who had ties to Karzai's brother. Holbrooke was debating how to raise such concerns when he met with Karzai, in Kabul, and I had the sense that



"He has no distinguishing features, really, but you can't miss him."

JOHN W. WILSON
1949-2009
FORGOT TO ASK HIS DOCTOR EVERYTHING HE WANTED TO ASK HIM
P.C.VEY

he had not yet figured out his strategy.

Holbrooke's op-eds in the *Post* had been critical of Karzai, and a former U.S. official familiar with Afghan politics described his manner at their meetings earlier this year as "imperial and directive." Karzai had begun to fear that the new American Administration wanted to get rid of him—last year, during a lunch in Kabul, Joe Biden threw down his napkin and walked out—and he met Holbrooke's pressure with defiance. "Holbrooke's approach backfired," the former official said. "He went out there and antagonized him first, without having a plan of how you would get rid of Karzai."

Holbrooke had inherited a major problem: Afghanistan's elections were constitutionally scheduled to take place between one and two months before Karzai's term ended, on May 22nd. But the Afghan election commission had decided to delay them until August, in order to have more time to prepare. Who would be President in the interim? The Obama Administration, feeling that stability was paramount, believed that Karzai should stay in office. Holbrooke invoked the political chaos in South Vietnam that followed the 1963 overthrow of President Diem by an American-backed coup. The American political strategy in Afghanistan was essentially on hold until after the elections, and Holbrooke seemed disinclined to continue to press Karzai to reform his government.

A NATO official with a lot of experience in Afghanistan told me that Holbrooke's day-to-day activities—so frantic that some Americans concluded he couldn't possibly keep track of everything he was doing—were beside the point. The agriculture programs and the rest of it were "ancillary" to the main problem, which was the government of Afghanistan: "Nothing else matters if you don't get this right." The NATO official worried that Holbrooke, instead of leaning hard on the Karzai government, might see Karzai as a necessary conduit for cutting a deal with the Taliban that would allow the Americans to leave. "Holbrooke is fundamentally not a nation-builder, he's a dealmaker," the official said. "But this is not something you can bargain your way out of."

Holbrooke, of course, had spent his youth trying to reform the government of South Vietnam and ended up seeking a negotiated solution. He had asked Ambassador Tim Carney, another Vietnam hand, to run the election-monitoring unit at the Embassy in Kabul. Over dinner and Scotch in the cafeteria, Carney told me, "You've got to go back to Vietnam, though this is not something Richard will say. He understands that we get into relationships that give the leaders of countries the strength of their weakness." The corrupt rulers of countries where the U.S. is at war can simply dare the Americans to end their support. "We can collapse the whole thing, but that's all we can do," Carney said. "What other leverage do we have?"

Burt Field, an Air Force major general and Holbrooke's military adviser, was beginning to question the military's model of how to fight the Taliban. He said that the Americans were telling the Afghans, "We're going to keep the Taliban off your back and connect you to your government—and that's counter-insurgency." But, Field went on, "it's premised on the fact that the government *wants* to be able to provide those key services. What if the premise is false?"

In Kabul, Holbrooke and Karzai faced off over lunch at a long banquet table in the Presidential palace, each man flanked by his advisers. Karzai, dressed in a white tunic and a black jacket, acted theatrically, calling out to aides for information in a stage voice, then expressing shock when they predicted lower voter turnout because of violence in Pashtun areas, where he drew most of his support.

"You're worried about the effect on the Pashtun people," Holbrooke said.

"And the aftermath of the elections. The effect on Al Qaeda and the Taliban. We've done an analysis."

Karzai's intelligence chief, Amrullah Saleh, explained that low turnout would give the Taliban a propaganda victory. "That's the main point," Karzai cut in. "They will claim control of the people."

"And the territory," Saleh added.

"And the territory."

Holbrooke sensed where this was leading, and he said, "Let's be clear—the elections will take place on August 20th." Karzai hastened to agree.

Holbrooke then chided him: "Wherever our troops have driven out the Taliban in Helmand over the last few weeks, there has been no effort to bring in administrative structures of your government."

"Has this been done in coördination with our government?" Karzai asked, chewing nervously, his eyes shifting everywhere except to Holbrooke's face.

"This is a huge issue for you," Holbrooke said, looking hard at Karzai. "I urge you to sit down with NATO and the Embassy to work on a quick-reaction administrative effort to bring to the districts health, schools, and, above all, justice."

Karzai nodded.

The subject of corruption didn't come up at the lunch, and when he and Karzai met privately, Holbrooke told me, he didn't explicitly address drug money. On the flight home, I asked Holbrooke how he could turn America's enormous investment in Afghanistan into leverage. Could he threaten to cut back on aid?

He waved off the idea. "That *really* hurts Karzai."

Then what?

Holbrooke paused for a full ten seconds. "Well, it's a constant tension in relationships like this one between what the Americans want and what the local officials want," he said. "And we're not always right about our goals—what we want—and the government we're supporting is not always right."

So, I asked Holbrooke, you can't yell at Karzai and Zardari the way you yelled at Milosevic?

"Obviously not," Holbrooke said. "You can't bomb them, either."

The election on August 20th was a disaster that could change the course of the war. The evidence of fraud by Karzai's campaign was so overwhelming that it threatened to render the entire vote illegitimate. Publicly, Holbrooke hailed the election; privately, colleagues said, he suggested that a runoff between Karzai and his main challenger, Abdullah Abdullah, might be necessary for the appearance of legitimacy. Karzai got wind of these words, and, when he and Holbrooke met, the Afghan President exploded, accusing the Americans of plotting to drive him out of office. Since then, Holbrooke has maintained a detached public stance, in order not to antagonize America's partner in Kabul and undermine the Afghan government's standing. He even compared Afghanistan's vast state-sponsored vote theft to an electoral controversy in Minnesota, saying, "That happens in democracies, even when they are not in the middle of a war."

Karzai, with his expressed fears about intimidation and low turnout in Pashtun areas, had been blowing smoke in the Americans' faces: in those very districts, with few or no voters going to the polls, his associates had been free to stuff empty boxes full of falsified ballots or set up phantom polling sites. The Americans appeared to have been unready for fraud on such a scale—before the election, Holbrooke's main concerns seemed to be violence and voter apathy. Now there is a strong possibility that a stolen election will leave Karzai in power for five more years, at the very moment that Obama has to answer his generals' request to send thousands more troops to fight, and perhaps die, on behalf of the Afghan government. But since his speech in late March the President has said very little publicly about the war, almost as if he lacked conviction about his own policy.

Christopher Hill once said of Holbrooke, "He often works on the music before he gets to the words, creating an atmosphere and a sense of what are we dealing with—are we dealing with a sad song, or what? Right now, Richard Holbrooke is getting a sense of the issues, the people. Eventually, the music will shift from Vietnam to the Balkans. And if he gets to a negotiation it will be realistic." When I repeated Hill's remark to Holbrooke on the plane, he took out a pen, and on a napkin he wrote down "INSTITUTION BUILDING." He drew a line under it, and below the line he wrote "DIP PHASE." "Things are not sequential," Holbrooke said. "They have to be parallel processes." He acknowledged that no Dayton would come at the end of the diplomatic phase. In both Vietnam and the Balkans, he said, "there was always a fixed adversary, with whom you could talk even while fighting." This time, the enemy had no capital, no government. It was very hard to imagine a cast of characters, in suits and uniforms and turbans, seated around a table, preparing to end the Af-Pak war, with Holbrooke standing over them, smiling the smile that told you he had won.

In our conversations, Holbrooke admitted that much of his new job had "a back-to-the-future quality," but he was wary of the subject of Vietnam, as if he smelled a trap. On the flight home, exasperated with my questions about his earlier life, he wrote out and handed to me a short account of the main reasons for America's failure in Vietnam, which concluded, "The mission itself was based on a profound misreading, by five presidents and their advisors, of the strategic importance of Vietnam to the U.S."

Even so, Holbrooke couldn't stop invoking the war of his youth. From Kabul, he called the journalist Stanley Karnow, an old friend, and put him on the phone with General McChrystal to discuss the lessons of Vietnam. He mentioned Vietnam in staff meetings in Washington, and he brought it up in a speech to American Embassy personnel on my last day in Kabul: "Having been in similar circumstances earlier in my career, in another war—as they say, in a distant galaxy and another time—I know what it's like to be out here in difficult conditions without your family." When he called for the Embassy to encourage spouses to come live in Kabul, despite the danger, Holbrooke was unconsciously repeating an idea that he had put forth in a memo in 1966.

On the trip, I watched him avoid the mistakes of his predecessors in Vietnam. He informed himself deeply, asked hard questions, pressed for an exit strategy, and emphasized the need to "Afghanize" the war. Vietnam helped Holbrooke understand the fine details of pacification programs, and made him confront the largest strategic question—whether a war should be fought at all. In Vietnam, what couldn't be done didn't need to be done; the war was a folly. Holbrooke was working from the simple deduction that, because Al Qaeda threatened the United States, America did need to be there. Obama had set the policy, and Holbrooke was carrying it out, relentlessly.

Holbrooke must know that there will be no American victory in this war; he can only try to forestall potential disaster. But if he considers success unlikely, or even questions the premise of the war, he has kept it to himself. "Americans cannot think of a situation where, in the face of attacks by Al Qaeda, they would give up, they would say, 'The hell with it, we have to leave,' " he told me. "It's just not an acceptable course of action." It was as if, for Holbrooke, the year would always be 1962, his career at its beginning. He said, "I still believe in the possibility of the United States, with all its will and all its strength, and I don't just mean military, persevering against any challenge. I still believe in that." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
George Packer's blog, Interesting Times.

ANNALS OF SCIENCE

A LIFE OF ITS OWN

Where will synthetic biology lead us?

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

The first time Jay Keasling remembers hearing the word "artemisinin," about a decade ago, he had no idea what it meant. "Not a clue," Keasling, a professor of biochemical engineering at the University of California at Berkeley, recalled. Although artemisinin has become the world's most important malaria medicine, Keasling wasn't an expert on infectious diseases. But he happened to be in the process of creating a new discipline, synthetic biology, which—by combining elements of engineering, chemistry, computer science, and molecular biology—seeks to assemble the biological tools necessary to redesign the living world.

Scientists have been manipulating genes for decades; inserting, deleting, and changing them in various microbes has become a routine function in thousands of labs. Keasling and a rapidly growing number of colleagues around the world have something more radical in mind. By using gene-sequence information and synthetic DNA, they are attempting to reconfigure the metabolic pathways of cells to perform entirely new functions, such as manufacturing chemicals and drugs. Eventually, they intend to construct genes—and new forms of life—from scratch. Keasling and others are putting together a kind of foundry of biological components—BioBricks, as Tom Knight, a senior research scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who helped invent the field, has named them. Each BioBrick part, made of standardized pieces of DNA, can be used interchangeably to create and modify living cells.

"When your hard drive dies, you can go to the nearest computer store, buy a new one, and swap it out," Keasling said. "That's because it's a standard part in a machine. The entire electronics industry is based on a plug-and-play mentality. Get a transistor, plug it in, and off you go. What works in one cell phone or laptop should work in another. That is true for almost everything we build: when you go to Home Depot, you don't think about the thread size on the bolts you buy, because they're all made to the same standard. Why shouldn't we use biological parts in the same way?" Keasling and others in the field, who have formed bicoastal clusters in the Bay Area and in Cambridge, Massachusetts, see cells as hardware, and genetic code as the software required to make them run. Synthetic biologists are convinced that, with enough knowledge, they will be able to write programs to control those genetic components, programs that would let them not only alter nature but guide human evolution as well.

No scientific achievement has promised so much, and none has come with greater risks or clearer possibilities for deliberate abuse. The benefits of new technologies—from genetically engineered food to the wonders of pharmaceuticals—often have been oversold. If the tools of synthetic biology succeed, though, they could turn specialized molecules into tiny, self-contained factories, creating cheap drugs, clean fuels, and new organisms to siphon carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

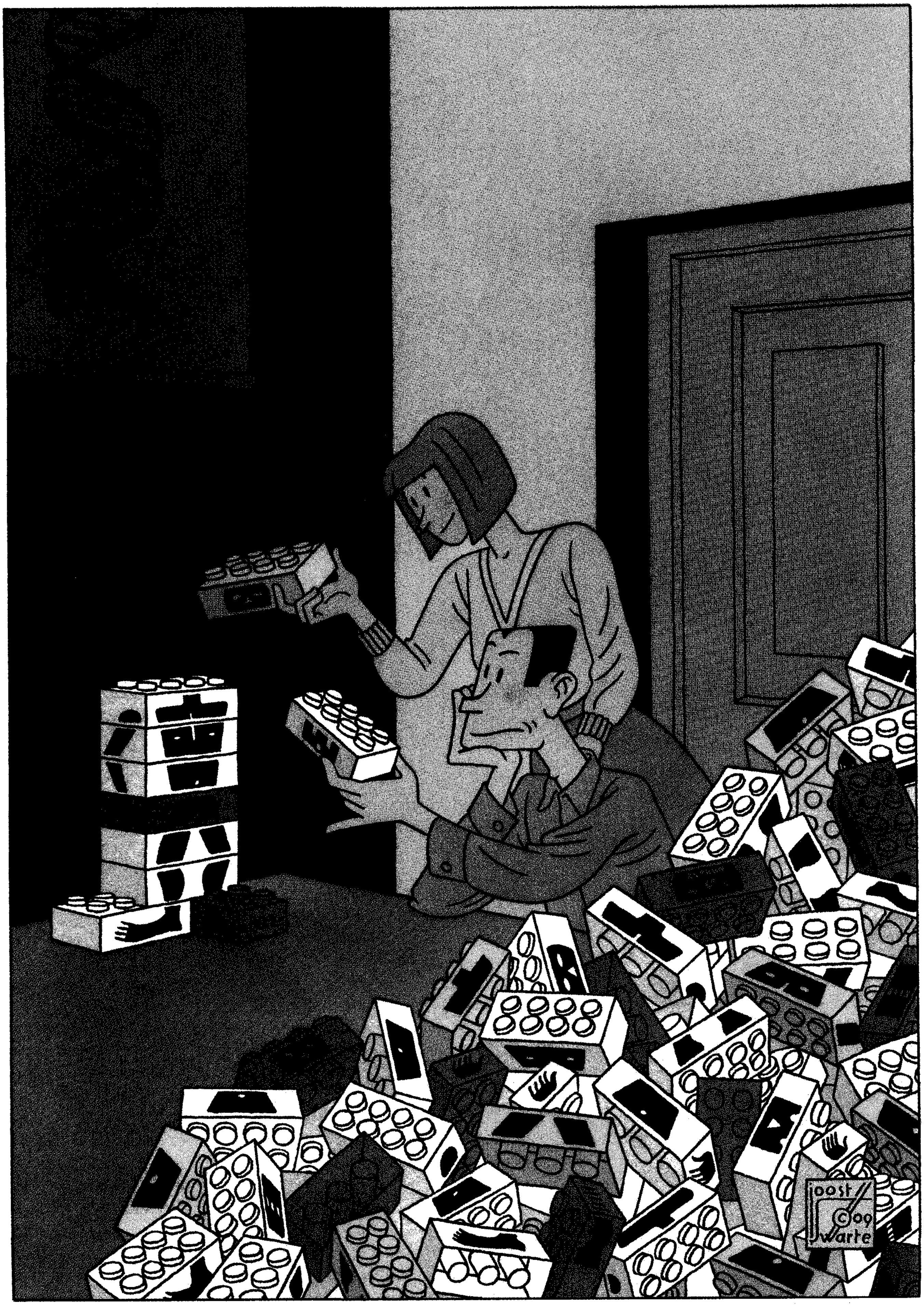
In 2000, Keasling was looking for a chemical compound that could demonstrate the utility of these biological tools. He settled on a diverse class of organic molecules known as isoprenoids, which are responsible for the scents, flavors, and even colors in many plants: eucalyptus, ginger, and cinnamon, for example, as well as the yellow in sunflowers and the red in tomatoes. "One day, a graduate student stopped by and said, 'Look at this paper that just came out on amorphadiene synthase,'" Keasling told me as we sat in his office in Emeryville, across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco. He had recently been named C.E.O. of the Department of Energy's new Joint BioEnergy Institute, a partnership of three national laboratories and three research universities, led by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. The consortium's principal goal is to design and manufacture artificial fuels that emit little or no greenhouse gases—one of President Obama's most frequently cited priorities.

Keasling wasn't sure what to tell his student. "'Amorphadiene,' I said. 'What's that?' He told me that it was a precursor to artemisinin, an effective anti-malarial. I had never worked on malaria. So I got to studying and quickly realized that this precursor was in the general class we were planning to investigate. And I thought, Amorphadiene is as good a target as any. Let's work on that."

Malaria infects as many as five hundred million of the world's poorest people every year and kills up to a million, most of whom are children under the age of five. For centuries, the standard treatment was quinine, and then the chemically related compound chloroquine. At ten cents per treatment, chloroquine was cheap and simple to make, and it saved millions of lives. By the early nineties, however, the most virulent malaria parasite—*Plasmodium falciparum*—had grown largely resistant to the drug. Worse, the second line of treatment, sulfadoxine-pyrimethanine, or SP, also failed widely. Artemisinin, when taken in combination with other drugs, has become the only consistently successful treatment that remains. (Reliance on any single drug increases the chances that the malaria parasite will develop resistance.) Known in the West as *Artemisia annua*, or sweet wormwood, the herb that contains artemisinic acid grows wild in many places, but supplies vary widely and so does the price.

Depending so heavily on artemisinin, while unavoidable, has serious drawbacks: combination therapy costs between ten and twenty times as much as chloroquine, and, despite increasing as-

JOOST SWARTE


joost swarte ©09

If the science truly succeeds, it will make it possible to supplant the world created by Darwinian evolution with one created by us.

PHONE
CHENEY

"Can I call you back? I've got eight million people in my office right now."

sistance from international charities, that is too much money for most Africans or their governments. Artemisinin is not easy to cultivate. Once harvested, the leaves and stems have to be processed rapidly or they will be destroyed by exposure to ultraviolet light. Yields are low, and production is expensive.

Although several thousand Asian and African farmers have begun to plant the herb, the World Health Organization expects that for the next several years the annual demand—as many as five hundred million courses of treatment per year—will far exceed the supply. Should that supply disappear, the impact would be incalculable. "Losing artemisinin would set us back years, if not decades," Kent Campbell, a former chief of the malaria branch at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and director of the Malaria Control Program at the nonprofit health organization PATH, said. "One can envision any number of theoretical public-health disasters in the world. But this is not theoretical. This is real. Without artemisinin, millions of people could die."

Keasling realized that the tools of synthetic biology, if properly deployed, could dispense with nature entirely, providing an abundant new source of artemisinin. If each cell became its own factory, churning out the chemical required to make the drug, there would be no need for an elaborate and costly manufacturing process, either. Why not try to produce it from genetic parts by constructing a cell to manufacture amorphadiene? Keasling and his team would have to dismantle several different organisms, then use parts from nearly a dozen of their genes to cobble together a custom-built package of DNA. They would then need to construct a new metabolic pathway, the chemical circuitry that a cell needs to do its job—one that did not exist in the natural world. "We have got to the point in human history where we simply do not have to accept what nature has given us," he told me.

By 2003, the team reported its first success, publishing a paper in *Nature Biotechnology* that described how the scientists had created that new pathway, by inserting genes from three organisms into E. coli, one of the world's most common bacteria. That research helped Keasling secure a $42.6-million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Keasling had no interest in simply proving that the science worked; he wanted to do it on a scale that the world could use to fight malaria. "Making a few micrograms of artemisinin would have been a neat scientific trick," he said. "But it doesn't do anybody in Africa any good if all we can do is a cool experiment in a Berkeley lab. We needed to make it on an industrial scale." To translate the science into a product, Keasling helped start a new company, Amyris Biotechnologies, to refine the raw organism, then figure out how to produce it more efficiently. Within a decade, Amyris had increased the amount of artemisinic acid that each cell could produce by a factor of one million, bringing down the cost of the drug from as much as ten dollars for a course of treatment to less than a dollar.

Amyris then joined with the Institute for OneWorld Health, in San Francisco, a nonprofit drugmaker, and, in 2008, they signed an agreement with the Paris-based pharmaceutical company Sanofi-Aventis to make the drug, which they hope to have on the market by 2012. The scientific response has been reverential—their artemisinin has been seen as the first bona-fide product of synthetic biology, proof of a principle that we need not rely on the whims of nature to address the world's most pressing crises. But some people wonder what synthetic artemisinin will mean for the thousands of farmers who have begun to plant the wormwood crop. "What happens to struggling farmers when laboratory vats in California replace farms in Asia and East Africa?" Jim Thomas, a researcher with ETC Group, a technology watchdog based in Canada, asked. Thomas has argued that there has been little discussion of the ethical and cultural implications of altering nature so fundamentally. "Scientists are making strands of DNA that have never existed," Thomas said. "So there is nothing to compare them to. There are no agreed mechanisms for safety, no policies."

Keasling, too, believes that the nation needs to consider the potential impact of this technology, but he is baffled by opposition to what should soon become the world's most reliable source of cheap artemisinin. "Just for a moment, imagine that we replaced artemisinin with a cancer drug," he said. "And let's have the entire Western world rely on some farmers in China and Africa who may or may not plant their crop. And let's have a lot of American children die because of that. Look at the world and tell me we shouldn't be doing this. It's not people in Africa who see malaria who say, Whoa, let's put the brakes on."

Artemisinin is the first step in what Keasling hopes will become a much larger program. "We ought to be able to make any compound produced by a plant inside a microbe," he said. "We ought to have all these metabolic pathways. You need this drug: O.K., we pull this piece, this part, and this one off the shelf. You put them into a microbe, and two weeks later out comes your product."

That's what Amyris has done in its efforts to develop new fuels. "Artemisinin is a hydrocarbon, and we built a microbial platform to produce it," Keasling said. "We can remove a few of the genes to take out artemisinin and put in a different gene, to make biofuels." Amyris, led by John Melo, who spent years as a senior executive at British Petroleum, has already engineered three microbes that can convert sugar to fuel. "We still have lots to learn and lots of problems to solve," Keasling said. "I am well aware that makes some people anxious, and I understand why. Anything so powerful and new is troubling. But I don't think the answer to the future is to race into the past."

For the first four billion years, life on Earth was shaped entirely by nature. Propelled by the forces of selection and chance, the most efficient genes survived, and evolution insured that they would thrive. The long, beautiful Darwinian process of creeping forward by trial and error, struggle and survival, persisted for millennia. Then, about ten thousand years ago, our ancestors began to gather in villages, grow crops, and domesticate animals. That led to stone axes and looms, which in turn led to better crops and a varied food supply that could feed a larger civilization. Breeding of goats and pigs gave way to the fabrication of metal and machines. Throughout it all, new species, built on the power of their collected traits, emerged, while others were cast aside.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, our ability to modify the smallest components of life through molecular biology had endowed humans with a power that even those who exercise it most proficiently cannot claim to fully comprehend. Human mastery over nature has been predicted for centuries—Bacon insisted on it, Blake feared it profoundly. Little more than a hundred years have passed, however, since Gregor Mendel demonstrated that the defining characteristics of a pea plant—its shape, its size, and the color of the seeds, for example—are transmitted from one generation to the next in ways that can be predicted, repeated, and codified.

Since then, the central project of biology has been to break that code and learn to read it—to understand how DNA creates and perpetuates life. The physiologist Jacques Loeb considered artificial synthesis of life the goal of biology. In 1912, Loeb, one of the founders of modern biochemistry, wrote that there was no evidence that "the artificial production of living matter is beyond the possibilities of science," and declared, "We must either succeed in producing living matter artificially, or we must find the reasons why this is impossible."

In 1946, the Nobel Prize-winning geneticist Hermann J. Muller attempted to do that. By demonstrating that exposure to X rays can cause mutations in the genes and chromosomes of living cells, he was the first to prove that heredity could be affected by something other than natural selection. He wasn't entirely sure that people would use that information responsibly, though. "If we did attain to any such knowledge or powers there is no doubt in my mind that we would eventually use them," Muller said. "Man is a megalomaniac among animals—if he sees mountains he will try to imitate them by pyramids, and if he sees some grand process like evolution, and thinks it would be at all possible for him to be in on that game, he would irreverently have to have his whack at that too."

The theory of evolution explained that every species on earth is related in some way to every other species; more important, we each carry a record of that history in our body. In 1953, James Watson and Francis Crick began to make it possible to understand why, by explaining how DNA arranges itself. The language of just four chemical letters—adenine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine—comes in the form of enormous chains of nucleotides. When they are joined, the arrangement of their sequences determines how each human differs from all others and from all other living beings.

By the nineteen-seventies, recombinant-DNA technology permitted scientists to cut long, unwieldy molecules of nucleotides into digestible sentences of genetic letters and paste them into other cells. Researchers could suddenly combine the genes of two creatures that would never have been able to mate in nature. As promising as these techniques were, they also made it possible for scientists to transfer viruses—and microbes that cause cancer—from one organism to another. That could create diseases anticipated by no one and for which there would be no natural protection, treatment, or cure. In 1975, scientists from around the world gathered at the Asilomar Conference Center, in Northern California, to discuss the challenges presented by this new technology. They focussed primarily on laboratory and environmental safety, and concluded that the field required little regulation. (There was no real discussion of deliberate abuse—at the time, there didn't seem to be any need.)

Looking back nearly thirty years later, one of the conference's organizers, the Nobel laureate Paul Berg, wrote, "This unique conference marked the beginning of an exceptional era for science and for the public discussion of science policy. Its success permitted the then contentious technology of recombinant DNA to emerge and flourish. Now the use of the recombinant DNA technology dominates research in biology. It has altered both the way questions are formulated and the way solutions are sought."

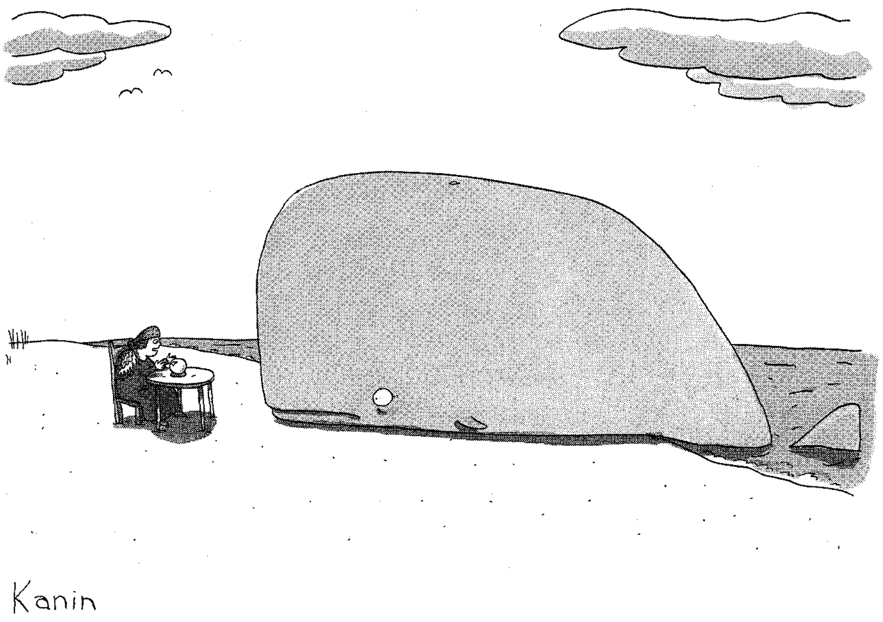
Decoding sequences of DNA was tedious. It could take a scientist a year to complete a stretch that was ten or twelve base pairs long. (Our DNA consists of three billion such pairs.) By the late nineteen-eighties, automated sequencing had simplified the procedure, and today machines can process that information in seconds. Another new tool—polymerase chain reaction—completed the merger of the digital and biological worlds. Using PCR, a scientist can take a single DNA molecule and copy it many times, making it easier to read and to manipulate. That permits scientists to treat living cells like complex packages of digital information that happen to be arranged in the most elegant possible way.

Using such techniques, researchers have now resurrected the DNA of the Tasmanian tiger, the world's largest carnivorous marsupial, which has been extinct for more than seventy years. In 2008, scientists from the University of Melbourne and the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, in Houston, extracted DNA from tissue that had been preserved in the Museum Victoria, in Melbourne. They took a fragment of DNA that controlled the production of a collagen gene from the tiger and inserted it into a mouse embryo. The DNA switched on just the right gene, and the embryo began to churn out collagen. That marked the first time that any material from an extinct creature other than a virus has functioned inside a living organism.

It will not be the last. A team from Pennsylvania State University, working with hair samples from two woolly mammoths—one of them sixty thousand years old and the other eighteen thousand—has tentatively figured out how to modify that DNA and place it inside an elephant's egg. The mammoth could then be brought to term in an elephant mother. "There is little doubt that it would be fun to see a living, breathing woolly mammoth—a shaggy, elephantine creature with long curved tusks who reminds us more of a very large, cuddly stuffed animal than of a T. Rex.," the *Times* editorialized soon after the discovery was announced. "We're just not sure that it would be all that much fun for the mammoth."

The ultimate goal, however, is to create a synthetic organism made solely from chemical parts and blueprints of DNA. In the mid-nineties, Craig Venter, working at the Institute for Genomic Research, and his colleagues Clyde Hutchison and Hamilton Smith began to wonder whether they could pare life to its most basic components and then use those genes to create such an organism. They began modifying the genome of a tiny bacterium called *Mycoplasma genitalium*, which contained four hundred and eighty-two genes (humans have about twenty-three thousand) and five hundred and eighty thousand letters of genetic code, arranged on one circular chromosome—the smallest genome of any cell that has been grown in laboratory cultures. Venter and his colleagues then removed genes one by one to find a minimal set that could sustain life.

Venter called the experiment the Minimal Genome Project. By the beginning of 2008, his team had pieced together thousands of chemically synthesized fragments of DNA and assembled a new version of the organism. Then, using nothing but chemicals, they produced from scratch the entire genome of *Mycoplasma genitalium*. "Nothing in our methodology restricts its use to chemically synthesized DNA," Venter noted in the report of his work, which was published in *Science*. "It should be possible to assemble any combination of synthetic and natural DNA segments in any desired order." That may turn out to be one of the most understated asides in the history of science. Next, Venter intends to transplant the artificial chromosome into the walls of another cell and then "boot it up," thereby making a new form of life that would then be able to replicate its own DNA—the first truly artificial organism. (Activists have already named the creation Synthia.) Venter hopes that Synthia and similar products will serve essentially as vessels that can be modified to carry different packages of genes. One package might produce a specific drug, for example, and another could have genes programmed to digest carbon in the atmosphere.



"I get the sense that there's some large body of water you're longing to return to—not a lake, maybe a sea? Is it an ocean?"

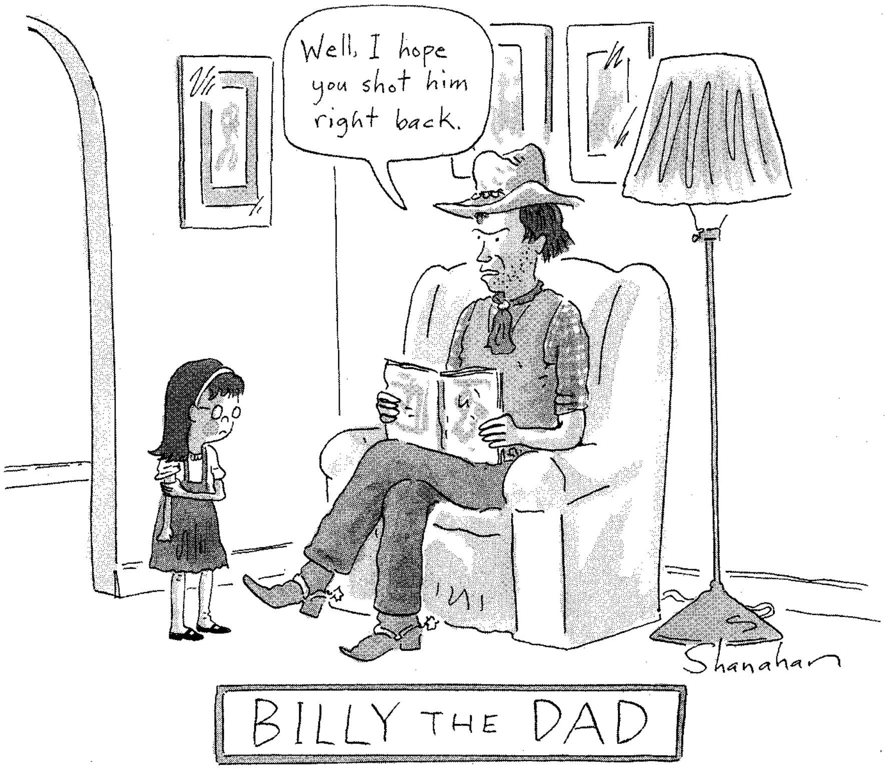
In 2007, the theoretical physicist Freeman Dyson, after having visited both the Philadelphia Flower Show and the Reptile Show in San Diego, wrote an essay in *The New York Review of Books*, noting that "every orchid or rose or lizard or snake is the work of a dedicated and skilled breeder. There are thousands of people, amateurs and professionals, who devote their lives to this business." This, of course, we have been doing in one way or another for millennia. "Now imagine what will happen when the tools of genetic engineering become accessible to these people."

It is only a matter of time before domesticated biotechnology presents us with what Dyson described as an "explosion of diversity of new living creatures. . . . Designing genomes will be a personal thing, a new art form as creative as painting or sculpture. Few of the new creations will be masterpieces, but a great many will bring joy to their creators and variety to our fauna and flora."

Biotech games, played by children "down to kindergarten age but played with real eggs and seeds," could produce entirely new species—as a lark. "These games will be messy and possibly dangerous," Dyson wrote. "Rules and regulations will be needed to make sure that our kids do not endanger themselves and others. The dangers of biotechnology are real and serious."

Life on Earth proceeds in an arc—one that began with the big bang, and evolved to the point where a smart teenager is capable of inserting a gene from a cold-water fish into a strawberry, to help protect it from the frost. You don't have to be a Luddite—or Prince Charles, who, famously, has foreseen a world reduced to gray goo by avaricious and out-of-control technology—to recognize that synthetic biology, if it truly succeeds, will make it possible to supplant the world created by Darwinian evolution with one created by us.

"Many a technology has at some time or another been deemed an affront to God, but perhaps none invites the accusation as directly as synthetic biology," the editors of *Nature*—who nonetheless support the technology—wrote in 2007. "For the first time, God has competition."


Well, I hope you shot him right back.
Shanahan
BILLY THE DAD

* * *

"What if we could liberate ourselves from the tyranny of evolution by being able to design our own offspring?" Drew Endy asked, the first time we met in his office at M.I.T., where, until the summer of 2008, he was assistant professor of biological engineering. (That September, he moved to Stanford.) Endy is among the most compelling evangelists of synthetic biology. He is also perhaps its most disturbing, because, although he displays a childlike eagerness to start engineering new creatures, he insists on discussing both the prospects and the dangers of his emerging discipline in nearly any forum he can find. "I am talking about building the stuff that runs most of the living world," he said. "If this is not a national strategic priority, what possibly could be?"

Endy, who was trained as a civil engineer, spent his youth fabricating worlds out of Lincoln Logs and Legos. Now he would like to build living organisms. Perhaps it was the three well-worn congas sitting in the corner of Endy's office, or the choppy haircut that looked like something he might have got in a tree house, or the bicycle dangling from his wall—but, when he speaks about putting together new forms of life, it's hard not to think of that boy and his Legos.

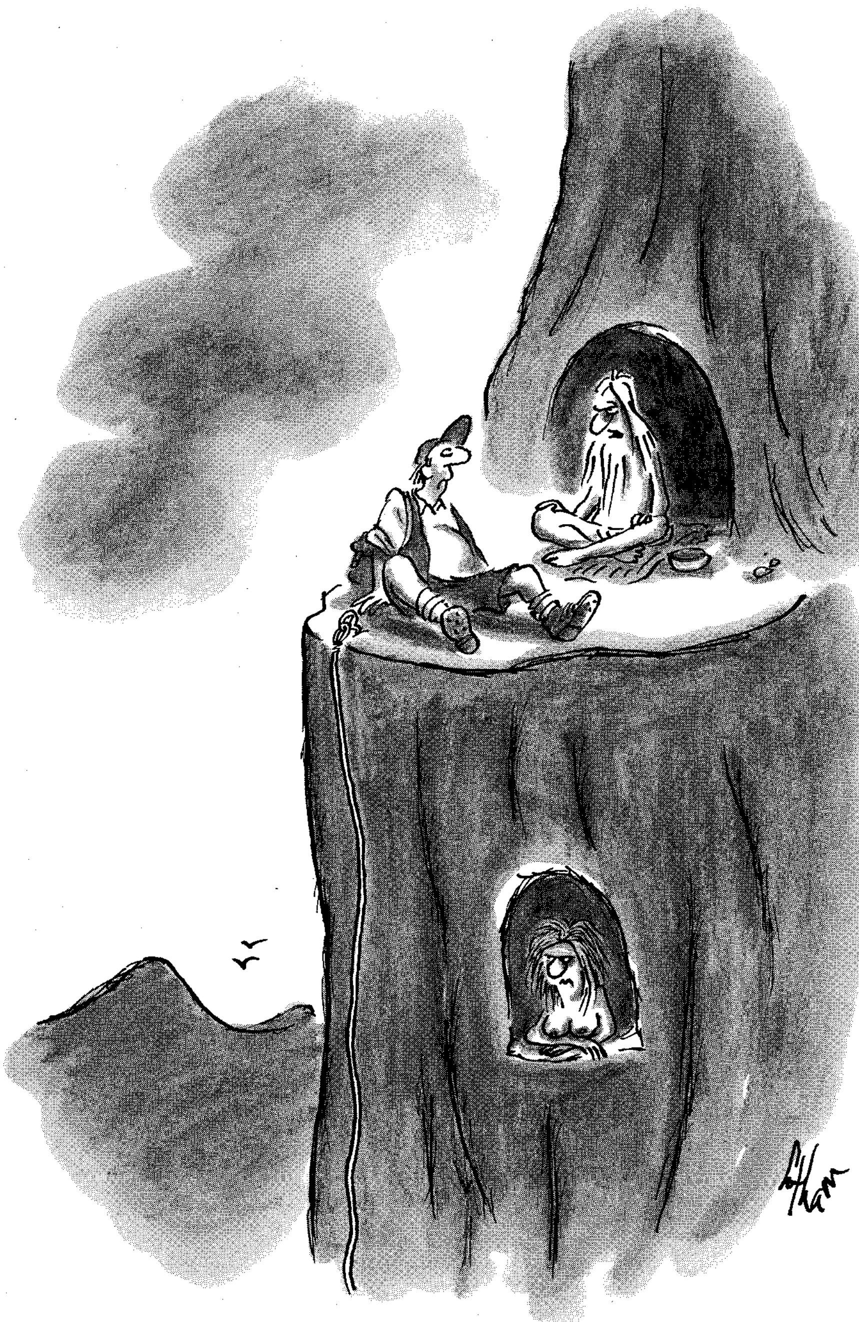
Endy made his first mark on the world of biology by nearly failing the course in high school. "I got a D," he said. "And I was lucky to get it." While pursuing an engineering degree at Lehigh University, Endy took a course in molecular genetics. He spent his years in graduate school modelling bacterial viruses, but they are complex, and Endy craved simplicity. That's when he began to think about putting cellular components together.

Never forgetting the secret of Legos—they work because you can take any single part and attach it to any other—in 2005 Endy and colleagues on both coasts started the BioBricks Foundation, a nonprofit organization formed to register and develop standard parts for assembling DNA. Endy is not the only scientist, or even the only synthetic biologist, to translate a youth spent with blocks into a useful scientific vocabulary. "The notion of pieces fitting together—whether those pieces are integrated circuits, microfluidic components, or molecules—guides much of what I do in the laboratory," the physicist and synthetic biologist Rob Carlson writes in his new book, "Biology Is Technology: The Promise, Peril, and Business of Engineering Life." "Some of my best work has come together in my mind's eye accompanied by what I swear was an audible click."

The BioBricks registry is a physical repository, but it is also an online catalogue. If you want to construct an organism, or engineer it in new ways, you can go to the site as you would one that sells lumber or industrial pipes. The constituent parts of DNA—promoters, ribosome-binding sites, plasmid backbones, and thousands of other components—are catalogued, explained, and discussed. It is a kind of theoretical Wikipedia of future life forms, with the added benefit of actually providing the parts necessary to build them.

I asked Endy why he thought so many people seem to be repelled by the idea of constructing new forms of life. "Because it's scary as hell," he said. "It's the coolest platform science has ever produced, but the questions it raises are the hardest to answer." If you can sequence something properly and you possess the information for describing that organism—whether it's a virus, a dinosaur, or a human being—you will eventually be able to construct an artificial version of it. That gives us an alternate path for propagating living organisms.

The natural path is direct descent from a parent—from one generation to the next. But that process is filled with



"Don't forget to pay the cashier on your way down."

errors. (In Darwin's world, of course, a certain number of those mutations are necessary.) Endy said, "If you could complement evolution with a secondary path, decode a genome, take it off-line to the level of information"—in other words, break it down to its specific sequences of DNA the way one would break down the code in a software program—"we can then design whatever we want, and recompile it," which could permit scientists to prevent many genetic diseases. "At that point, you can make disposable biological systems that don't have to produce offspring, and you can make much simpler organisms."

Endy stopped long enough for me to digest the fact that he was talking about building our own children. "If you look at human beings as we are today, one would have to ask how much of our own design is constrained by the fact that we have to be able to reproduce," he said. In fact, those constraints are significant. In theory, at least, designing our own offspring could make those constraints disappear. Before speaking about that, however, it would be necessary to ask two essential questions: What sorts of risk does that bring into play, and what sorts of opportunity?

The deeply unpleasant risks associated with synthetic biology are not hard to imagine: who would control this technology, who would pay for it, and how much would it cost? Would we all have access or, as in the 1997 film "Gattaca," which envisaged a world where the most successful children were eugenically selected, would there be genetic haves and have-nots and a new type of discrimination—genoism—to accompany it? Moreover, how safe can it be to manipulate and create life? How likely are accidents that would unleash organisms onto a world that is not prepared for them? And will it be an easy technology for people bent on destruction to acquire? "We are talking about things that have never been done before," Endy said. "If the society that powered this technology collapses in some way, we would go extinct pretty quickly. You wouldn't have a chance to revert back to the farm or to the prefarm. We would just be gone."

Those fears have existed since humans began to transplant genes in crops. They are the central reason that opponents of genetically engineered food invoke the precautionary principle, which argues that potential risks must always be given more weight than possible benefits. That is certainly the approach suggested by people like Jim Thomas, of ETC, who describes Endy as "the alpha Synthusiast." But he also regards Endy as a reflective scientist who doesn't discount the possible risks of his field. "To his credit, I think he's the one who's most engaged with these issues," Thomas said.

The debate over genetically engineered food has often focussed on theoretical harm rather than on tangible benefits. "If you build a bridge and it falls down, you are not going to be permitted to design bridges ever again," Endy said. "But that doesn't mean we should never build a new bridge. There we have accepted the fact that risks are inevitable." He believes the same should be true of engineering biology.

We also have to think about our society's basic goals and how this science might help us achieve them. "We have seen an example with artemisinin and malaria," Endy said. "Maybe we could avoid diseases completely. That might require us to go through a transition in medicine akin to what happened in environmental science and engineering after the end of the Second World War. We had industrial problems, and people said, Hey, the river's on fire—let's put it out. And, after the nth time of doing that, people started to say, Maybe we shouldn't make factories that put shit into the river. So let's collect all the waste. That turns out to be really expensive, because then we have to dispose of it. Finally, people said, Let's redesign the factories so that they don't make that crap."

Endy pointed out that we are spending trillions of dollars on health care and that preventing disease is obviously more desirable than treating it. "My guess is that our ultimate solution to the crisis of health-care costs will be to redesign ourselves so that we don't have so many problems to deal with. But note," he stressed, "you can't possibly begin to do something like this if you don't have a value system in place that allows you to map concepts of ethics, beauty, and aesthetics onto our own existence.

"These are powerful choices. Think about what happens when you really can print the genome of your offspring. You could start with your own sequence, of course, and mash it up with your partner, or as many partners as you like. Because computers won't care. And, if you wanted evolution, you can include random-number generators." That would have the effect of introducing the element of chance into synthetic design.

Although Endy speaks with passion about the biological future, he acknowledges how little scientists know. "It is important to unpack some of the hype and expectation around what you can do with biotechnology as a manufacturing platform," he said. "We have not scratched the surface. But how far will we be able to go? That question needs to be discussed openly, because you can't address issues of risk and society unless you have an answer."

Answers, however, are not yet available. The inventor and materials scientist Saul Griffith has estimated that powering our planet requires between fifteen and eighteen terawatts of energy. How much of that could we manufacture with the tools of synthetic biology? Estimates range between five and ninety terawatts. "If it turns out to be the lower figure, we are screwed," Endy said. "Because why would we take this risk if we cannot create much energy? But, if it's the top figure, then we are talking about producing five times the energy we need on this planet and doing it in an environmentally benign way. The benefits in relation to the risks of using this new technology would be unquestioned. But I don't know what the number will be, and I don't think anybody *can* know at this point. At a minimum, then, we ought to acknowledge that we are in the process of figuring that out and the answers won't be easy to provide.

"It's very hard for me to have a conversation about these issues, because people adopt incredibly defensive postures," Endy continued. "The scientists on one side and civil-society organizations on the other. And, to be fair to those groups, science has often proceeded by skipping the dialogue. But some environmental groups will say, Let's not permit any of this work to get out of a laboratory until we are sure it is all safe. And as a practical matter that is not the way science works. We can't come back decades later with an answer. We need to develop solutions by doing them. The potential is great enough, I believe, to convince people it's worth the risk."

I wondered how much of this was science fiction. Endy stood up. "Can I show you something?" he asked, as he walked over to a bookshelf and grabbed four gray bottles. Each one contained about half a cup of sugar, and each had a letter on it: A, T, C, or G, for the four nucleotides in our DNA. "You can buy jars of these chemicals that are derived from sugarcane," he said. "And they end up being the four bases of DNA in a form that can be readily assembled. You hook the bottles up to a machine, and into the machine comes information from a computer, a sequence of DNA—like T-A-A-T-A-G-C-A-A. You program in whatever you want to build, and that machine will stitch the genetic material together from scratch. This is the recipe: you take information and the raw chemicals and compile genetic material. Just sit down at your laptop and type the letters and out comes your organism."

We don't have machines that can turn those sugars into entire genomes yet. Endy shrugged. "But I don't see any physical reason why we won't," he said. "It's a question of money. If somebody wants to pay for it, then it will get done." He looked at his watch, apologized, and said, "I'm sorry, we will have to continue this discussion another day, because I have an appointment with some people from the Department of Homeland Security."

I was a little surprised. "They are asking the same questions as you," he said. "They want to know how far is this really going to go."

Scientists skipped a step at the birth of biotechnology, thirty-five years ago, moving immediately to products without first focussing on the tools required to make them. Using standard biological parts, a synthetic biologist or biological engineer can already, to some extent, program living organisms in the same way a computer scientist can program a computer. However, genes work together in ways that are staggeringly complex; proteins produced by one will counteract—or enhance—those made by another. We are far from the point where scientists might yank a few genes off the shelf, mix them together, and produce a variety of products. But the registry is growing rapidly—and so is the knowledge needed to drive the field forward.

Research in Endy's Stanford lab has been largely animated by his fascination with switches that turn genes on and off. He and his students are attempting to create genetically encoded memory systems, and his current goal is to construct a cell that can count to two hundred and fifty-six—a number derived from the mathematics of Basic computer code. Solving the practical challenges will not be easy, since cells that count will need to send reliable signals when they divide and remember that they did.

"If the cells in our bodies had a little memory, think what we could do," Endy said the next time we talked. I wasn't quite sure what he meant. "You have memory in your phone," he explained. "Think of all the information it allows you to store. The phone and the technology on which it is based do not function inside cells. But if we could count to two hundred, using a system that was based on proteins and DNA and RNA—well, now, all of a sudden we would have a tool that gives us access to computing and memory that we just don't have.

"Do you know how we study aging?" Endy continued. "The tools we use today are almost akin to cutting a tree in half and counting the rings. But if the cells had a memory we could count properly. Every time a cell divides, just move the counter by one. Maybe that will let me see them changing with a precision nobody can have today. Then I could give people controllers to start retooling those cells. Or we could say, Wow, this cell has divided two hundred times, it's obviously lost control of itself and become cancer. Kill it. That lets us think about new therapies for all kinds of diseases."

Synthetic biology is changing so rapidly that predictions seem pointless. Even that fact presents people like Endy with a new kind of problem. "Wayne Gretzky once said, 'I skate to where the puck is going to be.' That's what you do to become a great hockey player," Endy told me. "But where do you skate when the puck is accelerating at the speed of a rocket, when the trajectory is impossible to follow? Whom do you hire and what do we ask them to do? Because what preoccupies our finest minds today will be a seventh-grade science project in five years. Or three years.

"We are surfing an exponential now, and, even for people who pay attention, surfing an exponential is a really tricky thing to do. And when the exponential you are surfing has the capacity to impact the world in such a fundamental way, in ways we have never before considered, how do you even talk about that?"

For decades, people have invoked Moore's law: the number of transistors that could fit onto a silicon chip would double every two years, and so would the power of computers. When the I.B.M. 360 computer was released, in 1964, the top model came with eight megabytes of main memory, and cost more than two million dollars. Today, cell phones with a thousand times the memory of that computer can be bought for about a hundred dollars.

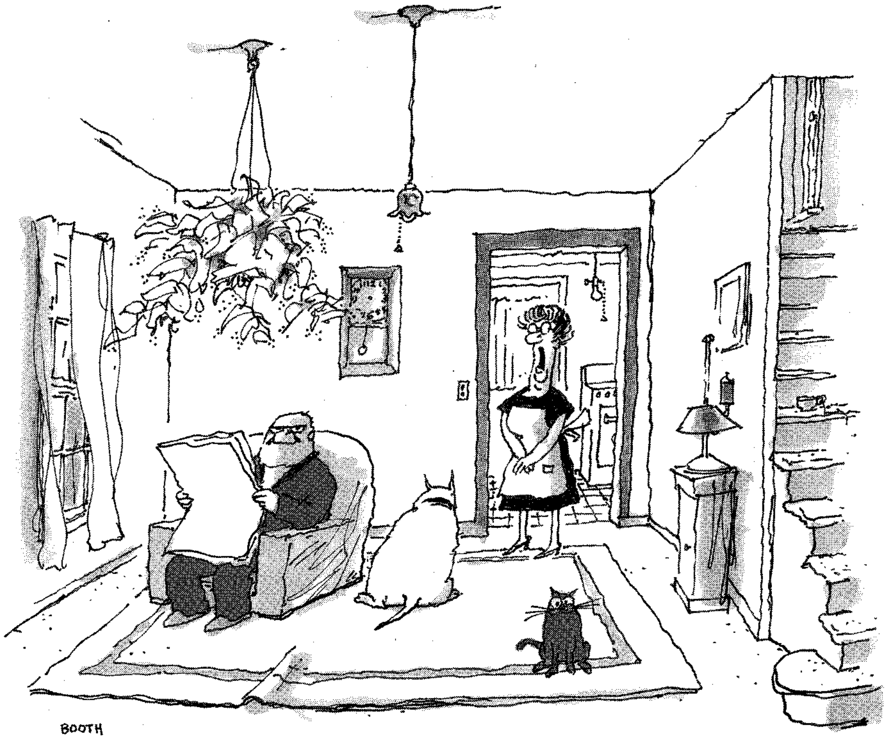
In 2001, Rob Carlson, then a research fellow at the Molecular Sciences Institute, in Berkeley, decided to examine a similar phenomenon: the speed at which the capacity to synthesize DNA was growing. He produced what has come to be known as the Carlson curve, and it shows a rate that mirrors Moore's law—and has even begun to exceed it. The automated DNA synthesizers used in thousands of labs cost a hundred thousand dollars a decade ago. Now they cost less than ten thousand dollars, and, most days, at least a dozen used synthesizers are for sale on eBay—for less than a thousand dollars.

Between 1977, when Frederick Sanger published the first paper on automatic DNA sequencing, and 1995, when the Institute for Genomic Research reported the first bacterial-genome sequence, the field moved slowly. It took the next six years to complete the first draft of the immeasurably more complex human genome, and six years after that, in 2007, scientists from around the world began mapping the full genomes of more than a thousand people. The Harvard geneticist George Church's Personal Genome Project now plans to sequence more than a hundred thousand.

In 2003, when Endy was still at M.I.T., he and his colleagues Tom Knight, Randy Rettberg, and Gerald Sussman founded iGEM—the International Genetically Engineered Machine competition—whose purpose is to promote the building of biological systems from standard parts. In 2006, a team of Endy's undergraduate students used BioBrick parts to genetically reprogram E. coli (which normally smells awful) to smell like wintergreen while it grows and like bananas when it is finished growing. They named their project Eau d'E Coli. By 2008, with more than a thousand students from twenty-one countries participating, the winning team—a group from Slovenia—used biological parts that it had designed to create a vaccine for the stomach bug *Helicobacter pylori*, which causes ulcers. There are no such working vaccines for humans. So far, the team has tested its creation on mice, with promising results.

This is open-source biology, where intellectual property is shared. What's available to idealistic students, of course, would also be available to terrorists. Any number of blogs offer advice about everything from how to preserve proteins to the best methods for desalting DNA. Openness like that can be frightening, and there have been calls for tighter control of the technology. Carlson, among many others, believes that strict regulations are unlikely to succeed. Several years ago, with very few tools other than a credit card, he opened his own biotechnology company, Biodesic, in the garage of his Seattle home—a biological version of the do-it-yourself movement that gave birth to so many computer companies, including Apple.

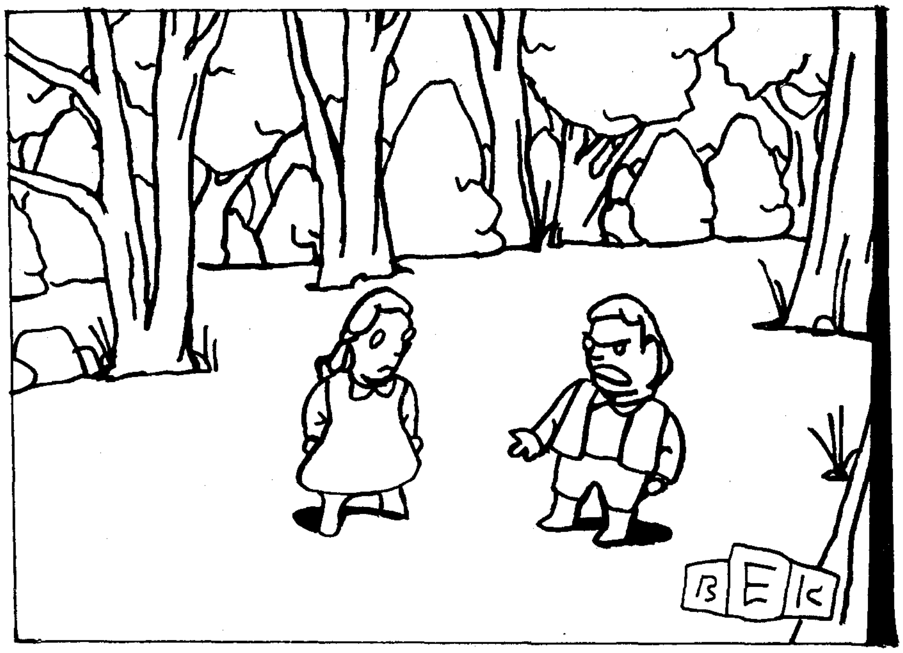
The product that he developed en-



"Are you ready to pound down some breakfast?"

ables the identification of proteins using DNA technology. "It's not complex," Carlson told me, "but I wanted to see what I could accomplish using mail order and synthesis." A great deal, it turned out. Carlson designed the molecule on his laptop, then sent the sequence to a company that synthesizes DNA. Most of the instruments could be bought on eBay (or, occasionally, on LabX, a more specialized site for scientific equipment). All you need is an Internet connection.

"Strict regulation doesn't accomplish its goals," Carlson said. "It's not an exact analogy, but look at Prohibition. What happened when government restricted the production and sale of alcohol? Crime rose dramatically. It became organized and powerful. Legitimate manufacturers could not sell alcohol, but it was easy to make in a garage—or a warehouse."



"Gretel, I don't like living in this culture of fear."

By 2002, the U.S. government intensified its effort to curtail the sale and production of methamphetamine. Previously, the drug had been manufactured in many mom-and-pop labs throughout the country. Today, production has been professionalized and centralized, and the Drug Enforcement Administration says that less is known about methamphetamine production than before. "The black market is getting blacker," Carlson said. "Crystal-meth use is still rising, and all this despite restrictions." Strict control would not necessarily insure the same fate for synthetic biology, but it might.

Bill Joy, a founder of Sun Microsystems, has frequently called for restrictions on the use of technology. "It is even possible that self-replication may be more fundamental than we thought, and hence harder—or even impossible—to control," he wrote in an essay for *Wired* called "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us." "The only realistic alternative I see is relinquishment: to limit development of the technologies that are too dangerous, by limiting our pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge."

Still, censoring the pursuit of knowledge has never really worked, in part because there are no parameters for society to decide who should have information and who should not. The opposite approach might give us better results: accelerate the development of technology and open it to more people and educate them to its purpose. Otherwise, if Carlson's methamphetamine analogy proves accurate, power would flow directly into the hands of the people least likely to use it wisely.

For synthetic biology to accomplish any of its goals, we will also need an education system that encourages skepticism and the study of science. In 2007, students in Singapore, Japan, China, and Hong Kong (which was counted independently) all performed better on an international science exam than American students. The U.S. scores have remained essentially stagnant since 1995, the first year the exam was administered. Adults are even less scientifically literate. Early in 2009, the results of a California Academy of Sciences poll (conducted throughout the nation) revealed that only fifty-three per cent of American adults know how long it takes for the Earth to revolve around the sun, and a slightly larger number—fifty-nine per cent—are aware that dinosaurs and humans never lived at the same time.

Synthetic biologists will have to overcome this ignorance. Optimism prevails only when people are engaged and excited. Why should we bother? Not just to make E. coli smell like chewing gum or fish glow in vibrant colors. The planet is in danger, and nature needs help.

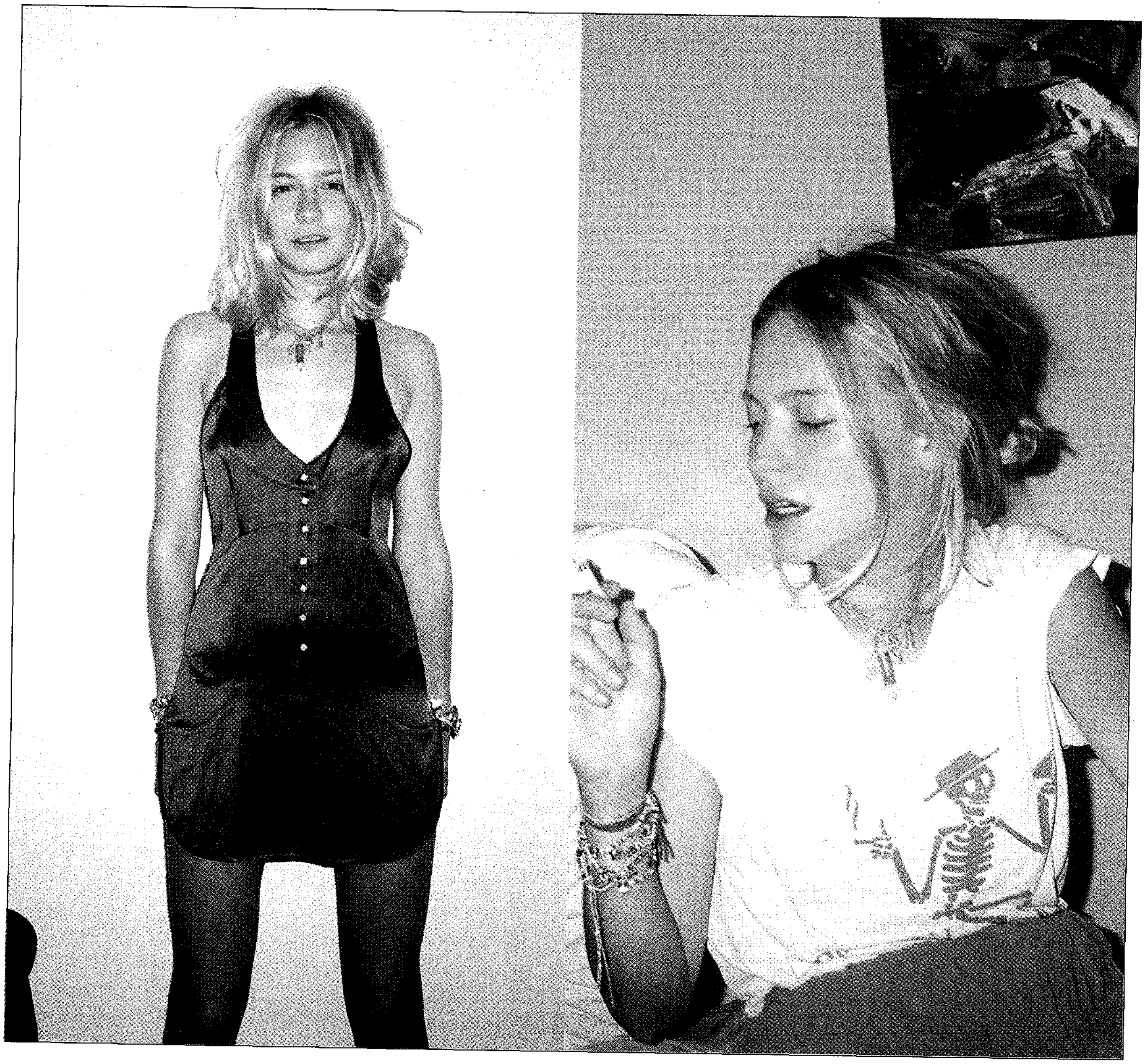
The hydrocarbons we burn for fuel are believed to be nothing more than concentrated sunlight that has been collected by leaves and trees. Organic matter rots, bacteria break it down, and it moves underground, where, after millions of years of pressure, it turns into oil and coal. At that point, we dig it up—at huge expense and with disastrous environmental consequences. Across the globe, on land and sea, we sink wells and lay pipe to ferry our energy to giant refineries. That has been the industrial model of development, and it worked for nearly two centuries. It won't work any longer.

The industrial age is drawing to a close, eventually to be replaced by an era of biological engineering. That won't happen easily (or quickly), and it will never solve every problem we expect it to solve. But what worked for artemisinin can work for many of the products our species will need to survive. "We are going to start doing the same thing that we do with our pets, with bacteria," the genomic futurist Juan Enriquez has said, describing our transition from a world that relied on machines to one that relies on biology. "A house pet is a domesticated parasite," he noted. "It is evolved to have an interaction with human beings. Same thing with corn"—a crop that didn't exist until we created it. "Same thing is going to start happening with energy," he went on. "We are going to start domesticating bacteria to process stuff inside enclosed reactors to produce energy in a far more clean and efficient manner. This is just the beginning stage of being able to program life." ♦

FICTION

TEMPORARY

BY MARISA SILVER



Vivian and Shelly lived in downtown Los Angeles, in an industrial space that belonged, nominally, to a ribbon factory, whose warehouse was attached. Shelly had discovered it one night when the band she belonged to then had played at an impromptu concert there. When the evening was over and everyone had cleared out, Shelly and a man she'd met that evening stayed on. The man left soon afterward, but Shelly did not. She worked out an arrangement with the owner of the ribbon factory: the rent would be paid in cash, and if Shelly was discovered by the housing authorities the owner would claim that she was a squatter.

Vivian met Shelly at the temp agency where they both applied for work. She had just finished two years of community college in Oklahoma and moved to L.A. Shelly offered her a small room in return for half the rent. She couldn't guarantee that they wouldn't be thrown out in a week, or a month, but it was cheaper than the motel where Vivian had been staying, and she wouldn't have to get out of bed two or three times a night to check the lock on the door, whenever a car parking in the lot or a drunken couple pinballing past caused it to rattle in a way that unnerved her. At Shelly's place, the thumps and grinds of machinery could be heard through the walls during the day. In addition to Vivian's room, there was a doorless bathroom and a large open space. A rolling garage door served as the only window. You pulled on a chain and by some miracle of simple machinery the metal door ratcheted open with a satisfying flourish that appealed to Shelly's sense of drama.

Vivian had never met a girl like Shelly, who left her money lying around on tables and liked to throw blindfold dinner parties. Vivian had to learn not to compliment Shelly's clothes or jewelry because Shelly had a habit of taking off whatever it was that Vivian liked and giving it to her. Vivian also had to learn to be blasé about coming out of her room in the morning to discover Shelly sleeping with a man they had met the evening before—or a woman. Vivian felt a little thrill at being able to carry off such sophisticated nonchalance, and she admired the way that Shelly slithered through her days and nights, shedding the most outrageous experiences as if they were simply the air she passed through. Shelly had negligible professional skills and wavering incentive, and only Vivian managed to get a temp placement—doing clerical work at an adoption agency. Still, Shelly managed to come home with bags full of mangoes and coconuts, and sometimes they drank margaritas and grilled steak on the loading dock outside the garage door, using Vivian's George Foreman. Shelly's last name was vaguely familiar to Vivian, as if she had seen it on packages at the grocery store, or maybe on television ads for insurance. But she didn't ask, because she didn't want to appear ignorant, and because her parents had taught her that it was impolite to talk about money.

At the adoption agency, Vivian was put to work at a computer in a small, windowless room where office supplies were kept; the walls were lined with bales of toilet paper and paper towels, industrial-sized bags of coffee and non-dairy creamer. Vivian's job was to transcribe the recorded interviews with prospective parents. These interviews were poorly taped, and Vivian spent her days winding the tape recorder back and forth in order to see if a husband had said that he loved children or loathed them, or if a wife had called herself infertile or infantile. Vivian herself was adopted—this was the single piece of information that had got her the job, as she typed only sixty words a minute and didn't know how to make a spreadsheet. Her adoptive parents were nice people. Until the recent recession put him out of business, her father had run a small jewelry store in a mall that catered mostly to young couples buying engagement rings and girls celebrating their *quinceañeras*. Her mother had worked as a secretary in a doctor's office. They were older than most parents, and had required little of Vivian when she was growing up. They had always treated her with a kind of cautious respect that she didn't see many other parents according their children. By the time she was ten, her father was sixty. At back-to-school nights, her parents stood by themselves while the younger parents exerted a kind of hysterical energy toward one another. "Oh, you're Alison's mother!" they'd say, as though Alison, with her accomplishments, bestowed a reflected glory on the parents who'd made her. No one came up to Vivian's parents to remark on Vivian, but this was understandable. Vivian was a "below-the-radar kind of girl," as her adviser had written on one midterm evaluation. This wasn't necessarily a bad thing, the adviser had added; not everyone could be a leader.

When Vivian was fourteen, her mother became sick and was on the verge of death. In her mother's hospital room, her parents told her that she was adopted. As it turned out, her mother made a miraculous recovery, but the cat was already out of the bag. The information didn't have much of an effect on Vivian. She lay in bed trying to feel different, now that she knew that her parents weren't her real parents, but she didn't feel different. The words "father" and "mother" were inextricably bound to the man and woman in the room down the hall, to her mother's Je Reviens perfume and her father's top dresser drawer filled with collar stays and golf tees. She was not imaginative enough to associate any other meaning with the words. She watched a television news show about a famous singer whose daughter had tracked her down after forty years. The famous singer seemed happy to have been found, and the two sat with their arms around each other and took long walks on the bluffs above the ocean, hand in hand. The women's intimacy made Vivian uncomfortable. Her own mother's kisses were dry, soft things, her hugs unassertive and prudent, as if she didn't want to cause Vivian any harm. But there was also a moment during the show when the two women looked at each other as if to say, "Now what?" And Vivian had the sense that the mother had some misgivings about being found, that having given up a child had become part of her personal mythology, her idea of herself. Now, faced with the real person, she had lost some of the romance of her story. Driving across the desert on her way to Los Angeles, Vivian had seen a billboard announcing that this same singer, who had been very popular in the seventies, would be performing five nights at a casino on an Indian reservation. This strengthened Vivian's decision not to explore her own adoption. You didn't always want to know everything.

Sometimes, when Vivian finished transcribing an interview at the adoption agency, she would add a note to the bottom of the document offering her opinion of the interviewed couple. No one had asked for her advice, but she felt compelled to give it, since a life was at stake. Mostly,

BEN RITTER

she thought the couples should be allowed to adopt, because whatever flaws they had were no worse than the flaws of people who could have children effortlessly, even thoughtlessly, and she knew that children could survive almost anything. In one case, though, she felt strongly that the husband was unkind to the wife, and she noted this at the bottom of her transcript. She could not explain how she knew this, never having seen the couple. But the woman sounded frightened in a way that set her apart from the other women, who were simply nervous during their interviews. She paused before each answer, as if waiting for the man's permission to speak, and at the end of her answers she always added, "Right, Paul?" The woman who ran the agency reprimanded Vivian for this insight and reminded her that her job was a temporary one. But Vivian kept track and she knew that the couple had not yet been matched with a child.

Shelly gave up looking for work. She said that she had too many projects of her own to concentrate on, and, besides, she just wasn't "the office type." This statement seemed slightly insulting to Vivian, who clearly *was* the office type, but she could not discount Shelly's generosity—the way she paid if they went out to dinner and brought home expensive wine for them to share—and Shelly's rejection of such commonplace concerns as making a living seemed exotic to Vivian. Shelly spent most of her mornings wandering around their living space in a loosely tied mint-green kimono, her small, freckled breasts winking out from the material as she moved. For a time, she took up painting and made large canvases on which she drew crude images of her face struck through with angry slashes of color. She organized a show of her work and a hundred strangers showed up at their home. Vivian wore one of Shelly's beaded dresses and Shelly wore body paint. The guests ate the food that they had prepared and refrained from buying anything. Shelly didn't seem to mind. After a few months, the canvases disappeared, though it was unclear to Vivian whether someone had finally bought them or Shelly had just thrown them into the Dumpster behind the ribbon warehouse to be carted away along with the giant spools of badly dyed grosgrain.

By this time, Shelly had become involved with a man named Toby, who stood on corners in Silver Lake and Echo Park handing out pamphlets about the Socialist Workers Party. He was a quiet man who wore thick-framed glasses and collared shirts, which he tucked into his jeans, and when he spoke to people he listened carefully, as if they were giving him directions. He had gone to a very good college back East, and when he talked fervently about his political beliefs Vivian admired his seriousness and his self-restraint, and the prominent tendons of his forearms. Shelly grunted a lot while having sex on the pullout, and in the mornings Toby left quickly, a ream of freshly printed flyers stuffed under his arm.

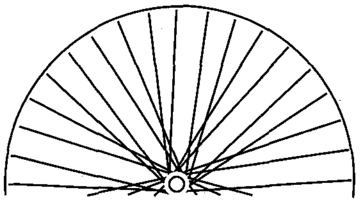
The couple whom Vivian had considered unsuitable for adoption had come back for a second interview. When Vivian turned on the tape recorder, the sound of the man's voice was so vivid that she looked over her shoulder, thinking he was behind her. Instead of starting to type, she pressed the headphones tightly to her ears and just listened to what was being said.

"Maybe we didn't make the right impression," the man said.

There was a pause, and then the wife said, "We have a lot of love to give. Right, Paul?"

"But that's what everybody says, of course," the man said. Vivian could hear the tension in his voice. He must have stood up at that point, because as he continued his voice grew distant and full of air. "You must hear stupid, obvious things like that every day," he said. " 'We have a lot of love to give.' It's probably meaningless to you. But what else can we say? We want a child. We have enough money to offer a child a good life, all the advantages. We're decent people with decent values. But it feels like we're paying the price for some biological glitch we have no control over."

The director of the agency assured them that they had done well in the interview process, but that it was her job to match up the right children with the right parents and this effort could take time.



"Some people don't test well," the man said. "Is that it?" His voice was louder, as if he were seated again.

The director told them that it wasn't a test.

"Sure it is," the man said. "Everything is a test."

When the interview was over, Vivian sat listening to the sound of empty tape winding through the recorder. She rewound it and listened again. *Some people don't test well.* The way he said it made it sound like a kind of attack. It was as if he could open up the director's head, peer into her brain, and see all her prejudices and value judgments. When he talked about the "stupid, obvious thing" his wife had said, Vivian imagined the woman looking at her lap, embarrassed that the compromises of her marriage were being exposed to a stranger, that it was she who seemed weak for accepting these insults, rather than her husband for hurling them.

Vivian rewound the entire interview and began to input it into the computer. The words were familiar to her now, and she tried to visualize the couple. She saw the man with dark, neatly cropped hair, muscular from hours at a gym. He was the kind of man who, when he was inside, wore his sunglasses on the back of his head like a pair of upside-down eyes. She imagined the woman as delicate and fair, clasping her hands as if they were wayward children who might break something if she let them go. She was beautiful, but rusted, as if her beauty had been abandoned, exposed to the elements. Vivian knew that she could be completely wrong about the couple. They might be fat. They might be Chinese. They might be the warmest people in the world, who would lavish on their adopted child the sort of palpable love advertised in greeting cards and on the collars of stuffed puppies. How could anyone know what kind of love another person had to give?

When Vivian got home that night, Toby was there alone. He sat at the table reading a book, his back straight, his head bent as if in prayer.

"She went to a thing at a club," he said.

"You didn't want to go?"

"I guess I'm not a club person."

"Whatever that is," she said.

He looked up and smiled, which embarrassed her, because she knew that they were both making fun of Shelly, and, in doing so, forming a secret bond. Why wasn't Toby at his own house? Maybe Shelly had left him at hers the way she left hundred-dollar bills lying around, evidence of her carelessness. Shelly's sofabed was open and unmade, red sheets spilling suggestively off the thin mattress. Vivian got a yogurt out of the refrigerator, and a filigreed spoon from the old Ball jar they used to hold the set of antique silver utensils that had belonged to Shelly's grandmother, and went to her room. She ate her yogurt but felt too awkward to go back out and throw the empty cup into the garbage, so she left it on the floor by her mattress, where it toppled over under the weight of the spoon. She tried to read a book, but she couldn't concentrate, knowing that Toby was in the other room, reading his book. She had to go to the bathroom. Somehow, when Shelly was there with Toby, using the doorless bathroom wasn't such a problem. But she couldn't imagine using it now. The more she thought about it, however, the more she needed to. She decided not to make eye contact with Toby as she crossed the main room. If she pretended that he wasn't there, maybe he would pretend that she wasn't there, either. In the bathroom, she peed quickly, with her eyes closed, as if he were the one who didn't want to be seen. The toilet made a grating mechanical sound when flushed, and the water pipes of the sink let out their customary screeching complaints, bedevilling Vivian's attempts at invisibility. After she'd dried her hands, she turned toward the doorway and there he was.

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't hear you."

"You didn't hear me?"

"I guess I was into my book."

"What are you reading?"

" 'Pnin,' " he said.

"Is it good?"

He glanced past her into the bathroom. "You finished in here?"

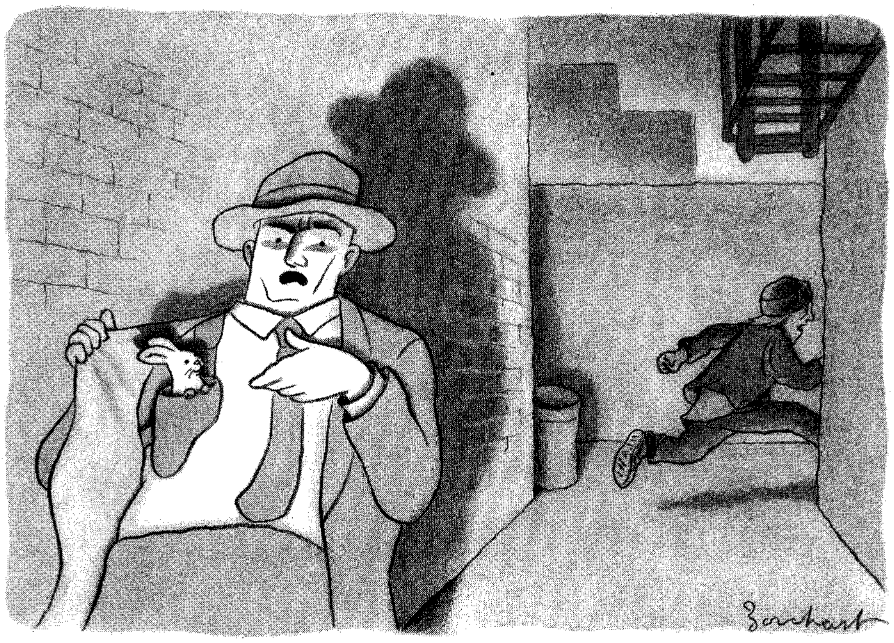
"Oh," she said, realizing that she was blocking the way.

She walked quickly back to her room, but not fast enough to avoid hearing his relieved groan and the hard stream as his piss hit the toilet bowl.

She took the empty yogurt cup and spoon to the kitchen area. He walked out of the bathroom, adjusting his jeans.

"Do you think you make a difference?" she said.

"What?"



"Damn it, Flopsy, you've cost me another bust."

"With your flyers. I mean, is anybody interested?"

"You're not, I guess."

"Do you really think people change their minds?"

"People change their minds all the time. I think I want a hamburger, but I order a pizza."

"That's a ridiculous comparison."

"Not really. That's how we progress as a culture. We change our minds and, little by little, we become something else."

"We become a more pizza-oriented culture," she said.

He smiled. He didn't seem offended.

"It's just, if someone walked up to me on the street and started talking about Communism or socialism I wouldn't stop."

He shrugged. "I'm not going to change your mind, then," he said.

The way he said this made her feel dismissed. She wanted to correct him. She wanted to be able to change her mind, wanted *him* to change her mind. But although he seemed to have convictions, he had the same careless quality as Shelly, a confidence that allowed them both to ride along above the dismal concerns of everyone else. Why did she care so much? Her care felt like a disfigurement, something that made it necessary for people like Shelly and Toby to distance themselves from her. Her care felt like something that would drag down the progress of human development. It made her an awkward, embarrassing person who asked what book you were reading when all you wanted to do was go to the bathroom. She felt her face flush and she returned to her room. She changed into her night clothes and got into bed and turned off the lamp, but she was too agitated to sleep.

When Vivian's mother was sick, she'd stayed in the hospital for months at a time, and Vivian and her father had learned how to get along in the house without her. Vivian had cooked breakfast and dinner, and her father had done the grocery shopping on his way home from the jewelry store. After dinner, he would wash the dishes and Vivian would clean the table and the counters. They saw her mother every evening during visiting hours. Sometimes, if her mother was very sick, Vivian wasn't allowed in the room, and she would sit in the waiting area until her father came out. He'd always say something cheerful, like "The doctor feels confident," or "She had good color tonight," and Vivian would respond in kind, knowing that they were both performing in a kind of play, and that they needed each other to remember the lines and deliver them with the right inflections. Once back home, her father would turn on the television. He kept it on all night to avoid the new silence in the house.

One day, Vivian decided that instead of going straight home from school she would take the bus to the mall and meet up with her father there. Maybe they could go out for dinner on their way to the hospital. After walking a block from the bus stop, she entered the dead weather of the mall. It was almost Easter, and a person dressed as a bunny hopped down the corridors, promoting a candy store by handing chocolate eggs to children. Vivian rode the escalator to the second floor, where her father's store was. Through the glass storefront, she saw her father come out from behind the counter to fasten a woman's necklace. The woman's neck was long and pale, and her dark hair was drawn to the side and over one shoulder to make way for the jewelry. When Vivian's father was finished with the clasp, he took the woman's hair and spread it carefully along her back, as if he were smoothing down a wrinkled dress. He rested his hands on the woman's bare shoulders while she admired herself in a handheld mirror, and Vivian's throat went dry. She left the mall and took the bus home. She never asked her father about what she had seen. She knew that if she did her life would split open and she would slip through the crack.

In a few months, Vivian's mother's recovery was certain, and she came home. She was weak for a time, resting in bed most of the day, but little by little she began to take up her household chores again, cooking and cleaning, although she never went back to work. One night, when Vivian and her parents were seated at the table, about to eat their dinner, her father started crying. Vivian had never seen her father cry, and it frightened her a bit. He was just so happy, he said, shaking his head at the folly of his emotion. Vivian's mother sat in her chair and smiled shyly, like a girl watching a boy approach across a dance floor and realizing that he has singled her out from all the girls around her.

A knock on her door made Vivian realize that she had almost been asleep. The door opened a crack and Toby stood silhouetted against the light of the outer room.

"Shelly just called," he said. "She's not coming back tonight."

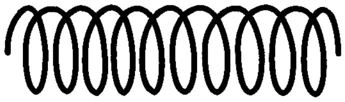
"Oh," Vivian said, sleepily, not quite understanding. But then she found herself moving over in bed and lifting the covers as an invitation. Toby stepped into the room, took off his clothes, and slid in beside her. His skin was warm, and when he moved on top of her Vivian felt the thin tautness of his body. She put her arms around his narrow shoulders as if he were a log floating in a river which she could rest on to catch her breath.

"Just for now," he whispered into her neck as he began to move faster on top of her. He was boyish in the way he announced his orgasm, and she felt protective of him as he rested, spent, in her arms. She wondered if she cared for him, if it mattered to her that tomorrow he would likely be gone for good, Shelly having obviously had enough of him. Was it possible to care and not to care at the very same moment, the way it was possible to be a husband and not, a parent and not?

The receptionist at the adoption agency went on maternity leave, and rather than hire another temp the director decided that Vivian could manage her work while sitting at the receptionist's desk. She instructed Vivian on how to handle the prospective parents who came to the office to be interviewed. Vivian was to be polite and helpful, in terms of offering water or coffee or directing them to the rest rooms in the hallway, but not overly solicitous and definitely not optimistic in any way. Vivian was confused by this last directive; she was unsure how to be helpful without giving off an air of optimism. Most couples sat in the waiting room in silence, fearing, perhaps, that anything they said in front of the receptionist might be used against them.

One afternoon a man walked into the office. He was a small, compact man with what her mother would have called a "coif" of thick, shiny hair. He was wearing an elegant suit of a modern cut, the jacket purposefully small, the pants short enough to reveal his garishly printed socks. He stood in front of her desk, and a second before he opened his mouth to speak Vivian realized who he was.

"Where's your wife?" she said, imagining that the man had forbidden his wife to come this time, that he had decided that her presence was what stood in the way of their getting a child.



"Excuse me?"

"Usually we see couples," Vivian said, covering for her blunder. She reminded herself to be polite and not optimistic. She didn't want to lose her job.

"I don't have an appointment," he said.

"She's doing an interview right now," Vivian said.

His face was anguished for a moment, as if he thought that this other couple were, at that very moment, being granted the child he'd hoped would be his. Of course, this was not the way it worked, but perhaps the man didn't know that.

"Is it O.K. if I wait?"

"I guess," Vivian said. "Do you want water? Or coffee?"

His face relaxed and opened up, and Vivian saw how great the barriers were between a person and his happiness, and how little it took to make him think they were small.

"I don't need anything," he said.

She tried to go back to her transcription, but she could not concentrate. She typed "zzzzzz" for an entire line, then "??????" for two more after that.

"My wife left me," he said.

She looked up. He was staring down at the checkerboard pattern on the linoleum floor, as if it were a code he was trying to crack.

"Oh," she said.

"Does she do single-parent adoptions?"

"I don't know," Vivian said. "I'm just a temp."

He nodded. Because his pants were so short, she could see his legs where his socks ended. The hair there was dark and smooth, as if combed.

The man stood up and walked over to the wicker bookshelf that held various books about adoption. He took down a paperback, flipped through it, put it back.

"Do you know what she looks for?" he said. "I mean, what type of people she accepts?"

"The stupid, obvious things," Vivian said. "People who have a lot of love to give." She was immediately ashamed of her small cruelty, but he did not seem to remember his own words.

He sat down again. "This is crazy. I don't even have an appointment."

Her job was temporary. The director had informed her that the receptionist, when she came back, would take on the job of transcribing the interviews, along with her other duties. Vivian had proved that it could be done. Vivian had a feeling, too, that she would soon have to find a new living arrangement. Shelly had found out about the night with Toby and had said that she didn't care, but things felt different now.

"Why did your wife leave you?" Vivian asked.

The man looked at her, stricken. "I don't know," he said finally.

For some reason, she believed him. She was sure that he had all the information: perhaps his wife had had enough of his meanness; perhaps she had a lover; perhaps she didn't like the fact that he was the kind of man who cared about fashion. Vivian believed that he understood the facts, but that, still, he didn't know.

Vivian's mother lived for another three years, until Vivian was seventeen and almost finished with high school. Toward the end, she began to lose her eyesight. The doctors said that this was a result of the tumor growing back—it was pressing on nerves. Surgery was out of the question; the tumor was clinging to the brain like a child to its mother, as if it didn't really believe that it was a separate thing in and of itself. This time, Vivian's mother told her that she was definitely going to die. She didn't want Vivian to think that because a miracle had taken place once it might again.

"And now we know," she said. "It wasn't a miracle after all."

Strangely, those last three years were some of the happiest Vivian could remember. Her mother threw caution to the winds. They had dinners of crackers and canned cheese if they felt like it. They watched movies until three in the morning, even on school nights. Her father's business was beginning to fail, and, occasionally, he brought home jewelry for Vivian and her mother. Vivian's mother would protest, but he rationalized these gifts, saying that he would have to lower the prices so drastically to make a sale that he might as well not sell the pieces at all.

"When I ordered this," he said, fastening a necklace around his wife's neck, "I imagined how it would look on you."

Vivian remembered him making the same gestures with the woman in the store that day, and it occurred to her that she might have misunderstood what she had seen. That her father might simply have been generous with a stranger. But she did not really believe this. As she watched her mother admire her new necklace in a mirror, Vivian realized that she would always have to choose what to believe, and that, chances were, more often than not she would be wrong.

In the last month of her life, Vivian's mother took up smoking. She was completely blind by then. She had always wanted to smoke, she said. She had always thought that a woman with a cigarette looked elegant, even if it gave her cancer. Vivian bought a pack of Parliaments on her way home from school one afternoon. Her mother put a cigarette in her mouth and Vivian lit it for her with a long kitchen match. Her mother, too weak to sit up in bed, lay against her pillows and inhaled deeply. She coughed, and they laughed, but soon enough she got the hang of it, except that when she exhaled she did a funny thing: she blew out again and again, like a woman practicing for childbirth. She looked silly and not at all elegant, but Vivian didn't say anything, because her mother seemed so happy. When her father came home that evening, he watched his wife enjoy her cigarette.

"What is that you're doing?" he said, as she exhaled.

"What?" she asked, her thin voice made even thinner by the stress of the smoke in her lungs.

"You look like a fish, sweetheart," he said, and he put his face to hers and blew out puffs of air onto her cheek until she giggled. For a second, Vivian caught a glimpse of what her mother had looked like as a little girl.

"But I can't see. How do I know when all the smoke is gone?" she said, her voice coy, flirtatious.

"You don't have to worry about that," he said, brushing a strand of hair from her cheek. "It'll all come out in the end."

She smiled and took a drag on the cigarette. She let out a smooth trail of smoke. She kept her eyes closed as Vivian and her father watched the delicate curl of smoke dissolve and disappear, like sugar on the tongue. ♦

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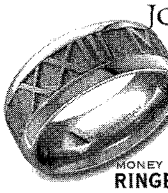

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THE CRITICS

BOOKS

TRIAL OF THE CENTURY

Revisiting the Dreyfus affair.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

On a January day in Paris, in 1895, a ceremony was enacted in the courtyard of the École Militaire, on the Champ-de-Mars, that still shocks the mind and conscience to contemplate: Alfred Dreyfus, a young Jewish artillery officer and family man, convicted of treason days earlier in a rushed court-martial, was publicly degraded before a gawking crowd. His insignia medals were stripped from him, his sword was broken over the knee of the degrader, and he was marched around the grounds in his ruined uniform to be jeered and spat at, while piteously declaring his innocence and his love of France above cries of "Jew" and "Judas!" It is a ceremony that seems to belong to some older, medieval Europe, of public torture and autos-da-fé and Inquisitions.

Dreyfus 5.1.95
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Dreyfus was convicted on the evidence of handwriting identified as a "self-forgery," and a single initial in a playful lover's note.

Yet it took place in the immediate shadow of the monument of modernity, the Eiffel Tower, then six years old, which loomed at the north end of the Champ-de-Mars. The very improbability of such an act's happening at such a time—to an assimilated Jew who had mastered a meritocratic system and a city that was the pride and pilothouse of civic rationalism—made it a portent, the moment where Maupassant's world of ambition and pleasure met Kafka's world of inexplicable bureaucratic suffering. The Dreyfus affair was the first indication that a new epoch of progress and cosmopolitan optimism would be met by a countervailing wave of hatred that deformed the next half century of European history.

The Dreyfus affair never goes away, and is the subject of a brave new book by the novelist and lawyer Louis Begley, "Why the Dreyfus Affair Matters" (Yale; $24). Brave because Begley wants to use the occasion not for French-bashing, or for reciting the enduring history of European anti-Semitism, bleak as it is, but as a pointed warning and reminder of how fragile the standards of civilized conduct prove in moments of national panic. The Dreyfus affair matters, he believes, because we have, in the past decade, made our own Devil's Island and hundreds of new Dreyfuses—the Dreyfus affair matters because we're still in the middle of it. Begley, as he recounts the story of the Parisian fin-de-siècle legal drama, also spends many pages showing that among the prisoners in places like Guantánamo are many Dreyfuses—innocent, as he was, and, on the whole, much worse treated. He wants to arraign Americans, and particularly those who fetishize the Dreyfus case without grasping its principles: that every accused person should be able to face his accusers in a fair trial, and that national panic makes bad policy and false prisoners.

Yet a parallel can be potent without being, point by point, persuasive: Dreyfus was not the Faceless Foreigner but the Enemy Within. Far from being faceless, he was all face: the haters never tired of describing and drawing his hideousness. "His face is grey, flattened and base, showing no sign of remorse . . . a wreck from the ghetto," the journalist Léon Daudet wrote. That hideous degradation ritual is at the heart of the Dreyfus affair; it was meant to be public and demonstrative—this is what happens to faithless Jews. The degradation of the prisoners at Guantánamo was essentially private and utilitarian: talk or we'll subject you to unspeakable humiliations.

The Dreyfus affair matters not because of the parallel with our time but because it was one of the first tests of modern pluralist liberalism and its institutions—a test that those institutions somehow managed to pass and fail at the same time. In France a century ago, the system finally worked, as they used to say after Watergate. The good guys rallied around, the courts did their job, Dreyfus was vindicated and came home to his

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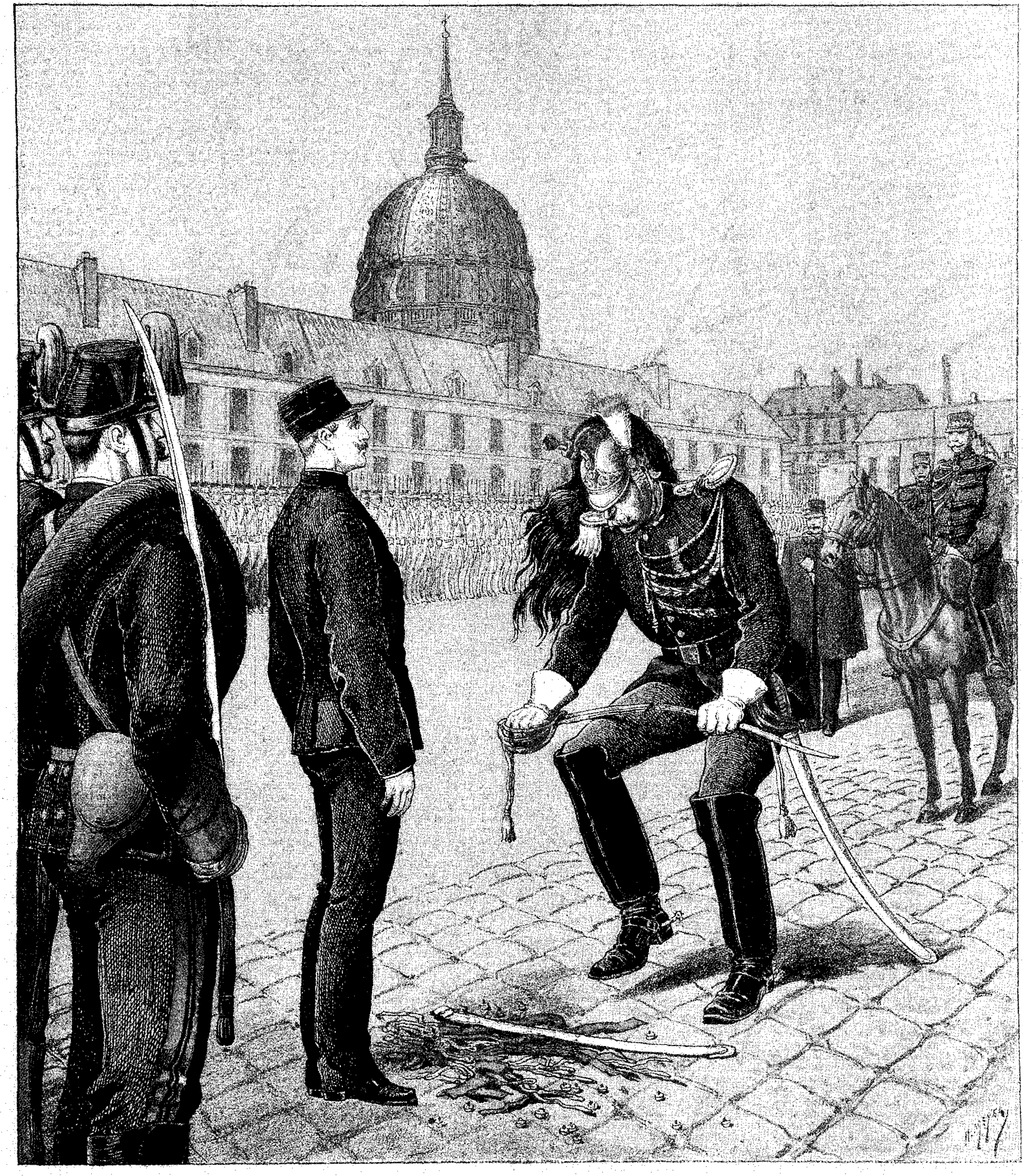


LE TRAITRE

Dégradation d'Alfred Dreyfus

LEONARD DE SELVA/CORBIS; OPPOSITE: PHILIPPE WEISBECKER; APIC/GETTY

family. Yet what the system exposed as it worked was, in a way, worse than the injustice it remedied. It showed that a huge number of Europeans, in a time largely smiling and prosperous, liked engaging in raw, animal religious hatred, and only felt fully alive when they did. Hatred and bigotry were not a vestige of the superstitious past but a living fire—just what comes, and burns, naturally.

The typical modern media melodrama involves the courtroom: from Scopes to O.J., the dramatic proscenium of a trial gives structure to the spectacle of modern life. The Dreyfus affair, in some ways the first of those dramas, held France spellbound in part because it included not one but at least six trials; to keep track of them—the trials and courts-martial of Dreyfus defenders and accusers, as well as his own—is exhausting. Just last year, though, George R. Whyte published in paperback his remarkably complete documentary compendium, "The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History" (Palgrave-Macmillan; $37); the best extended narrative in English is still Michael Burns's account in "Dreyfus: A Family Affair," published back in 1991.

Alfred Dreyfus came from Alsace, which was part of his luck and then part of his tragedy. In 1870, the armies of Prussia and Germany invaded France and routed the government of Napoleon III. As spoils of war, the Prussians took most of Alsace and Lorraine, the northeastern provinces; the figure of Strasbourg in the Place de la Concorde was draped in black (and remained that way until after the First World War). This meant that the Jews of Alsace were both frustrated foreigners and beloved native sons. Even though Alsace and Lorraine were only dubiously "French" in the first place, their loss drove Frenchmen mad.

Above all, many Frenchmen thought that France had lost the war because it had turned away from the faith. For the Paris of Dreyfus's time was really a city of two towers—across the city from the Eiffel Tower, the Basilica of Sacré-Coeur, with its monumental bell tower, had been slowly rising since the eighteen-seventies, as a sort of counter-monument, done in a gargantuan Romanesque manner then seen as the true mystical style of Franco-Catholicism. It was dedicated explicitly to the expiation of the sins of 1870 and the redemption of France by a restored Catholic Church. Apollinaire used the two towers—one the shepherd of modern life, the other the fountain, the bleeding heart of the past—to structure his vision of the city in his great poem on Paris, "Zone."

A saner response to the war had been to reform and democratize the French Army, by making its officer ranks meritocratic and national rather than aristocratic and narrow. Dreyfus, as a Jewish son of Alsace, took advantage of these reformist impulses, and came to Paris to enter the French military academy and become an artillery officer. He did not fit the model of the traditional duelling and debauching officer, all scars and debts, but represented a new model, of the officer as bourgeois family man. He eventually settled with his wife and two children in a grand apartment on the Avenue du Trocadéro.

It was in that city of two towers, one finished and one rising, that, in the fall of 1894, Dreyfus became the accidental victim of a stupid plot, which was not, in its origins, anti-Semitic. The French Section de Statistique—the Army's intelligence service—had an agent within the German Embassy: a cleaning woman who every night emptied the wastebaskets of the military attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Maximilien von Schwarzkoppen, and brought the torn-up papers to her government. From the scraps, the spies reassembled a shocking memorandum, the *bordereau*, in which a French officer offered to sell military secrets. The nature of the secrets to be sold seemed to point to an artillery officer, and suspicion fell on Dreyfus, not least because he made regular visits to his family in Mulhouse, then still in German hands. With the normal prejudice of the secret police in favor of their own suspicions, the Statistique had Dreyfus arrested. As always, pseudo-science came to the aid of paranoia: the Statistique called on a "graphologist" for an opinion, and he testified that the *lack* of resemblance between Dreyfus's writing and that of the *bordereau* was proof of a "self-forgery," and prepared a fantastically detailed diagram to demonstrate that this was so.

The *bordereau* had actually been written by another officer, Major Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy—one of those subjects in the history of espionage who are so obviously guilty that only the geniuses of counter-intelligence could look past them. Like Aldrich Ames and Guy Burgess, Esterhazy had done everything short of wearing a nametag on his shirtfront reading "Spy." Staggered by gambling debts, he was the debauched son of an illegitimate daughter of an illegitimate claimant to the Hungarian royal line, and had written to a mistress at length about his hatred of the French Army. Just as no one in the C.I.A. asked why Ames had the money for a sports car, no one in the Statistique seemed inclined to wonder if a man notorious throughout the Army for being a drunk in perpetual debt might be a likelier candidate to have sold secrets than a Jewish family man.

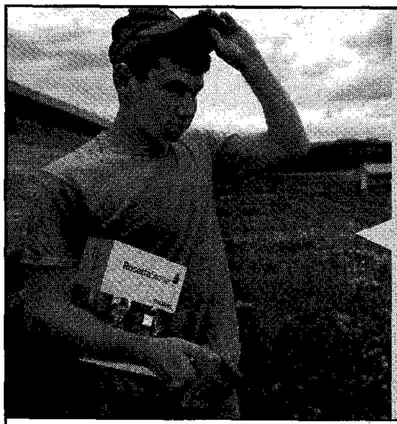
Then black comedy was piled on stupidity. It turned out that Schwarzkoppen, the German military attaché, had begun an erotic affair with Major Alessandro Panizzardi, the Italian military attaché—it was not called the gay nineties for nothing—and that they wrote to each other in an allusive and sinister-sounding private code. One of their letters, stolen from a second source, included a reference to someone whom Schwarzkoppen called "this scoundrel of a D.," and who had offered "plans of Nice"—though the whole thing may have been a bantering reference to another lover. (The letter ends, to give a taste of the whole, "Don't exhaust yourself with too much buggery.")

Despite its obviously louche tone, this letter was submitted to the judges in a "secret dossier," which Dreyfus and his lawyers were not allowed to know about, let alone see. (One of the smaller ironies of the affair is that it involves the collision of two subcultures, ambiguous Jewish identity and the obliquities of gay "coding," that did so much to make the modernist sensibility.) But on that evidence—a handwriting identification admitted to be based on an absence of resemblance, and a single initial in a playful lover's note—Dreyfus was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

If anti-Semitism didn't start the Dreyfus affair, it fuelled it. The accusation was first kept secret, but as soon as it was made public the secrecy itself became an occasion for assault: the Army was protecting a traitor Jew. First, loudest, and nastiest among the explicitly anti-Semitic enemies of Dreyfus was Édouard Drumont, whose book "Jewish France" had already, in the eighteen-eighties, been a huge success. Drumont's book was above all an anti-immigrant manifesto. He was responding to the waves of Jewish immigrants from Germany and Eastern Europe who had arrived in France during the previous twenty or so years, bringing with them, he argued, values and a faith alien to Christian France. In a tone familiar from today's anti-Muslim polemics, and using the usual toxic cocktail of absurdly inflated numbers, hysterical overstatement, and guilt by association (many anarchists were Jews), Drumont managed to convince readers that France's real crisis was the decline of Christianity. This had happened under the demoralizing pressure of modern art and culture, which was, of course, Jewish culture: the culture of bankers and speculators and atheists and decadent artists. It seemed perfectly natural—a heartbreaking irony, in retrospect—to suspect that Jews would sell out France to their spiritual home in Germany.

Drumont's hatred was of a somewhat new kind: where for Voltaire the Jews had been evil as a relic of antiquity, for Drumont they were evil as a herald of modernity. Before, the Jews' refusal to change was a sign of their iniquity; now their appetite for change was the sign. The more eagerly a Jew attempted to escape from Judaism, the more Jewish he revealed himself to be—a snaky shape-shifter with no allegiances to anything except clan. The Catholic Church, in turn, seized on Drumont's ideology, and a virulent anti-Semitism became, especially in the pages of the Catholic newspaper *La Croix*, the new tonic note of even respectable French Catholicism. This coalition of hatred of immigrants and Catholic reaction did not put Dreyfus in a cage. But it helped keep him there.

It's hard to remain dry-eyed when reading about Dreyfus's next five years. Overnight the most despised man in the country he worshipped, he was torn from his wife and children and sent to rot on a tiny, desolate island in the Atlantic, in a prison altered to prevent him from ever seeing the ocean that surrounded him. (It must also be said, with Begley, that his treatment was by modern American standards benevolent. Convicted of the worst crime imaginable, selling out France to the Germans, he was still given almost all the books he wanted to read from and all the paper he needed to write on, and he used both.) Because of his always cold and correct demeanor, and in part because the regime of silence that was imposed on him at Devil's Island left him for the rest of his life with a rasping voice, the idea has been spread that Dreyfus was an essentially mediocre, if gallant, man. The image is far from the truth; awkward and uncharismatic he may have been, but Dreyfus was what we now call deep, a serious and cultivated soul. In captivity, shackled to his bed at night, he saved his sanity by reading: he read Tolstoy, Nietzsche, the French classics, and made intelligent notes on them. More than anything, he read Shakespeare. He worked his way through all the great tragedies—eventually and laboriously teaching himself to read them in the original—and found in those stories a sense of life and a language adequate to his own condition. He copied



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out Othello's lines on honor, and sent them to his wife, Lucie.

He was, as far as he knew, utterly alone and friendless. In truth, he had one supreme ally at home—his brother Mathieu, who had stayed in the family textile business, and was Alfred's main support. Mathieu worked brilliantly and tirelessly for his martyred brother. Pretty much everyone in authority had an uneasy sense that Dreyfus had been railroaded, and many who had no particular liking for Jews still felt that anti-Semitism was something worse than false; they thought it was vulgar. Early on, Mathieu made a key ally of Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, the vice-president of the French Senate, who strongly intimated that he knew that Mathieu's brother was innocent but could not say why. (The reason for his confidence came out later: in an incident that one would think possible only in the Internet age, one of Esterhazy's stockbrokers had seen the *bordereau* reproduced in a newspaper, and at once recognized the handwriting of his ne'er-do-well client.)

Mathieu displayed a kind of genius in seeing that the case for justice was more persuasive than the case for vengeance—that it was necessary to take the position that an injustice had been done by error, rather than that an evil had been done on purpose. The barrier to his brother's vindication, he grasped, was less anti-Semitism than the perceived assault on the honor of the Army.

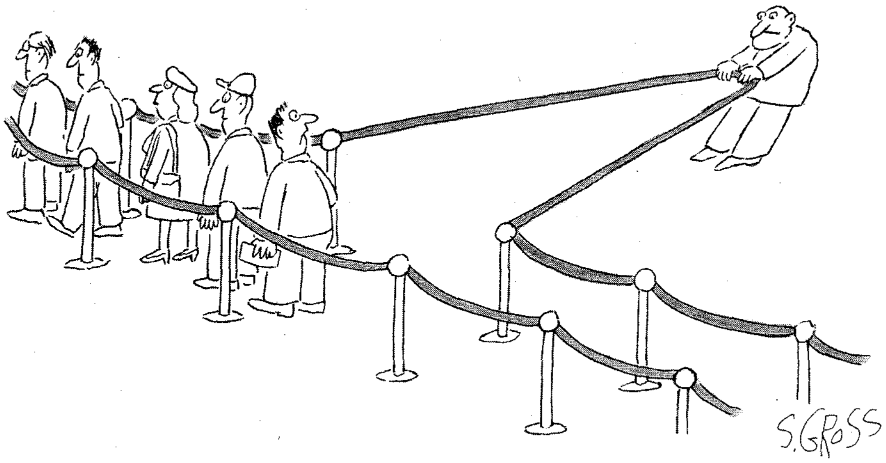
For beneath the affair was a great historical transformation. Before the eighteen-seventies, European armies were understood to be made up of desperate men who couldn't find a better job and stupid officers who couldn't inherit a better place. Though a useful tool of empire, the army was hardly revered as an institution. But, with the late-century growth of the "open" and then of the mass-conscription army, the European army became something more than an instrument: it became the spine of honor, the sword and shield of the nation. It would not do to question its integrity, to suppose that the army was a human institution made up of good men and bad, and more inclined than most, through the habit of blind obedience and the nature of its mission, to do the wrong thing unless closely watched. Many on the anti-Dreyfusard side were prepared to admit, sotto voce, that the case against Dreyfus was not very strong. But, given that Germany posed an existential threat to France, an attack on the French Army was an attack on the nation's future. The same forces of reform that had opened the Army to Dreyfus and raised it to a national *sacre* were now conspiring to keep him locked up. That was the heart of the affair, and of Mathieu's dilemma; he had to find a way to liberate his brother without challenging the honor of the Army—which was, despite it all, still as sacred to his brother as to everyone else.

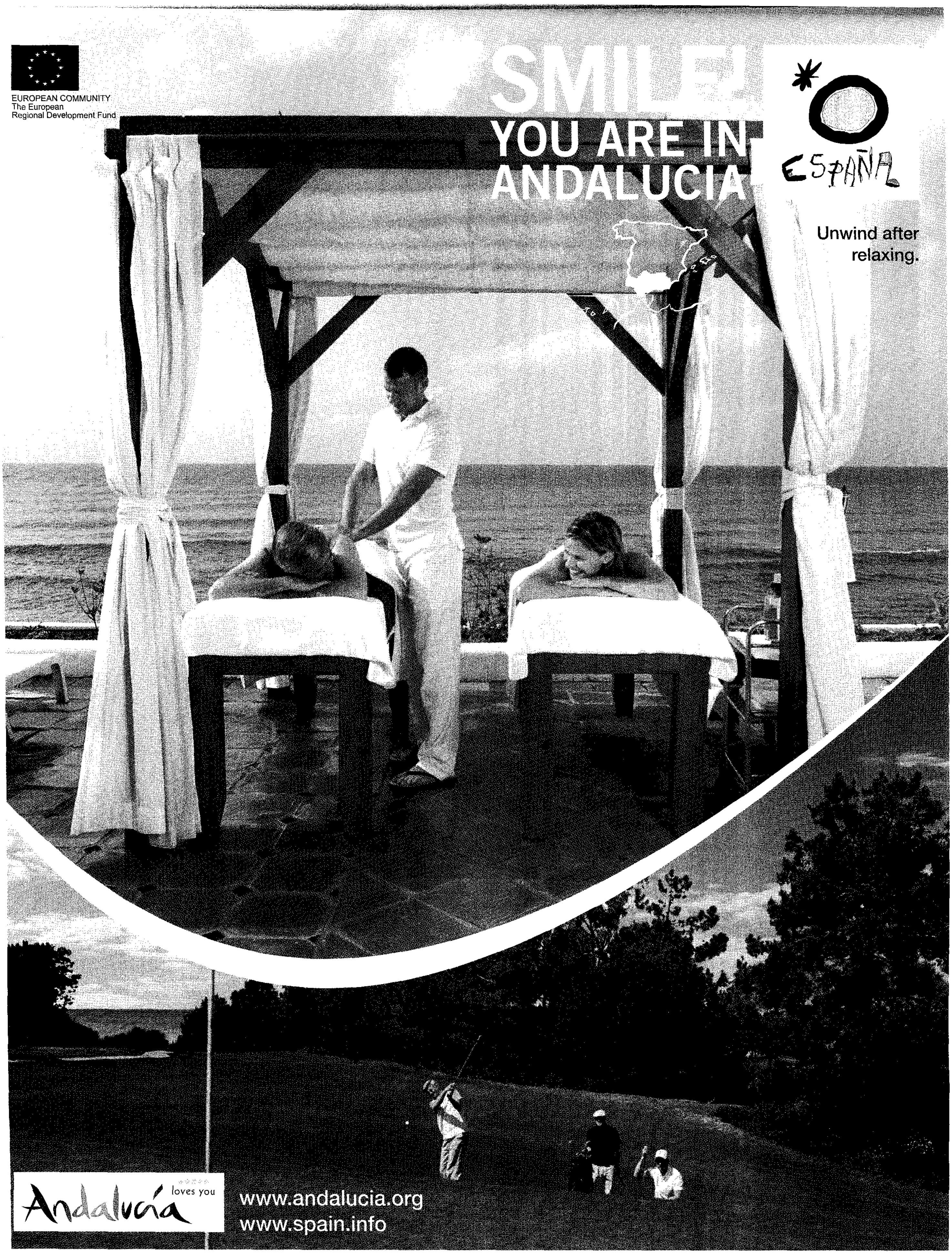
The unmaking of the Dreyfus case is a very long story—so complex, and taking place at such a snail's pace and in such wayward directions, that almost no one has ever been able to relate it simply. Essentially what happened is that the evidence of Dreyfus's innocence that Mathieu unearthed became too overwhelming to deny, and progressive politicians came into power who were ready to act on that evidence. There were nearly as many reversals as advances. A lieutenant colonel, Georges Picquart, was put in charge of the Statistique, and soon realized, thanks to an intercepted telegram, that Esterhazy was the real culprit. When he announced this in a report, he was promptly cashiered and transferred to the fringes of empire by panicked superiors, and then imprisoned on trumped-up charges of revealing other secrets. (Picquart is one of the truly admirable figures in the story—anti-Semitic by inclination and background, he was a friend of Mahler, and, above all, a dutiful officer, who had followed the facts, despite the consequences.) Meanwhile, another member of the Statistique, Joseph Henry, began to forge, crudely, new documents that pointed to Dreyfus—though it's unclear whether he did this in conspiracy with Esterhazy or out of a conviction that Dreyfus was guilty and a feeling that it did no harm to put a thumb on the scale of justice.

It was then, too, around 1898, that the affair became the Affaire, the preoccupation of all educated France. It suddenly took in not just the Army and the Jews but the central question of modern French history: nation or republic? Was one's loyalty to be given to the nation as a repository of a heritage, mystical and ethnic in nature, or to a set of abstract ideals achieved by reason and available to all? These arguments split the upper and the educated classes—dividing even the Impressionists, the anti-Dreyfusards Degas and Renoir drawing daggers with Pissarro and Monet.

Stirred into movement by Mathieu, the entire liberal establishment, frightened and feeble at first, began to enlist in the cause; the great left-wing politician Jean Jaurès joined, then the publisher and future Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, then the novelist Émile Zola—none of them Jewish, but with a certain self-interest in seeing the right done down, and, above all, with a passion for republicanism and a sense that it could not survive this parody of justice. They insisted that they were asking France to be faithful to its own declared rules. Esterhazy, in a typically reckless though well-calculated move, demanded a court-martial, which, held in secret, ended, predictably, with his acquittal.

It was this trial, not Dreyfus's, that caused Zola, the morning after, to publish "J'Accuse," in a daily newspaper that Clemenceau ran—detailing all the evidence of Dreyfus's innocence and (breaking, at last, with the playbook) arraigning the Army

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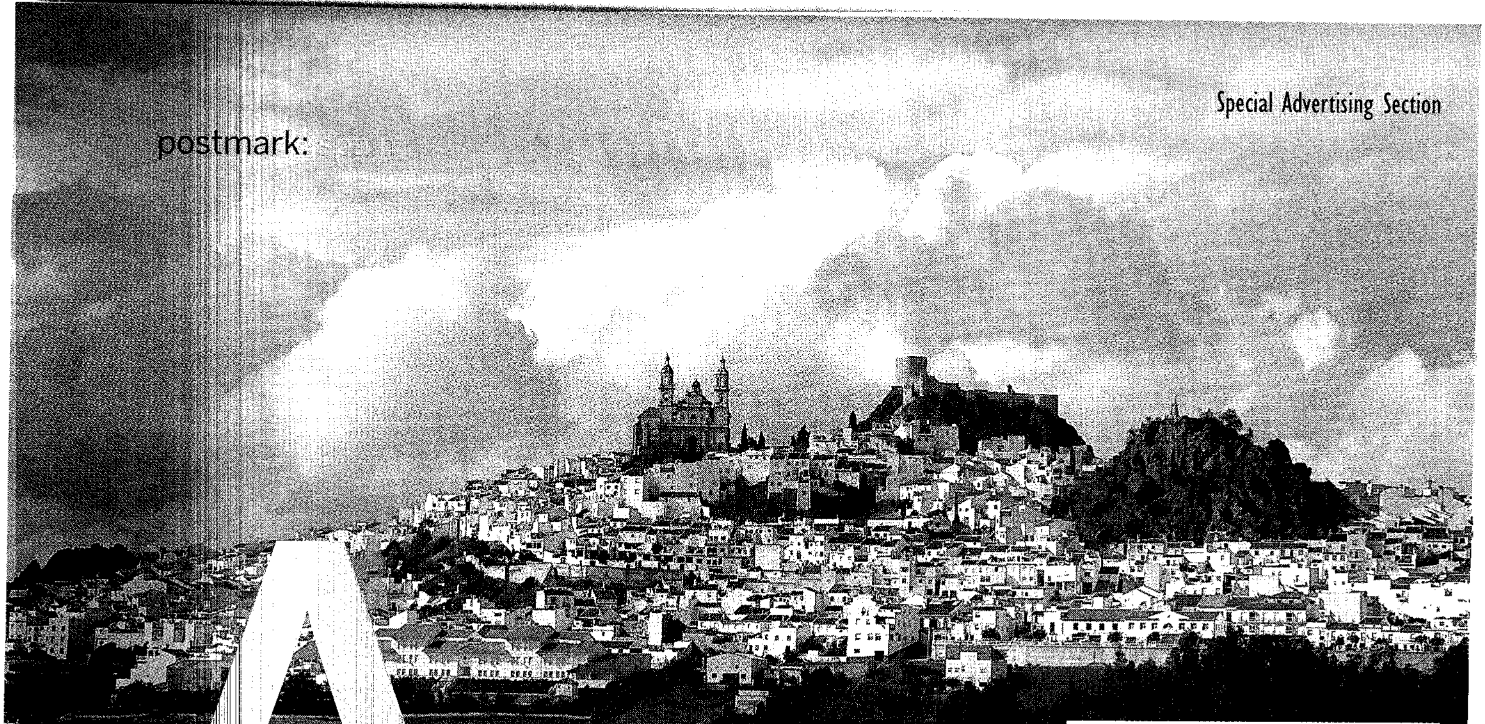


Andalucía's White Towns

Many hotels only claim to offer balcony views, but the easily accessible Pueblos Blancos of Andalucía are balcony *towns:* perched amid the picturesque rocky peaks of Cádiz and Málaga, they overlook the dramatic scenery of the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park.

The White Towns' appellation derives from the perpetually whitewashed buildings—topped with tile roofs and decorated with a profusion of potted flowers and wrought-iron grilles—that make these nearly two dozen villages sparkle in the bright Andalucian light. There is also a distinctly Mediterranean feel, due to the region's Moorish heritage.

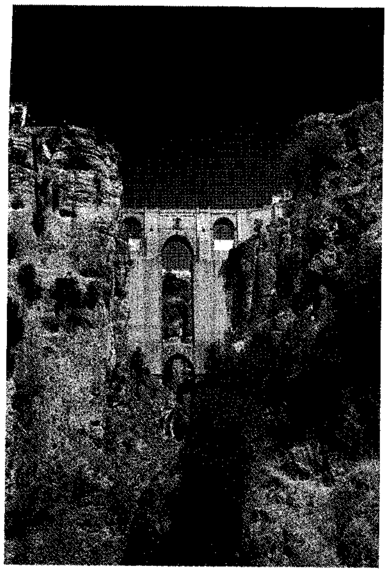
In addition to enjoying the panoramic vistas, local handicrafts, and cuisine, visitors can take part in regional activities including horseback riding, cycling, hiking, rock climbing, and potholing (exploring caves and grottoes, some of which contain prehistoric paintings or stalactites and stalagmites).

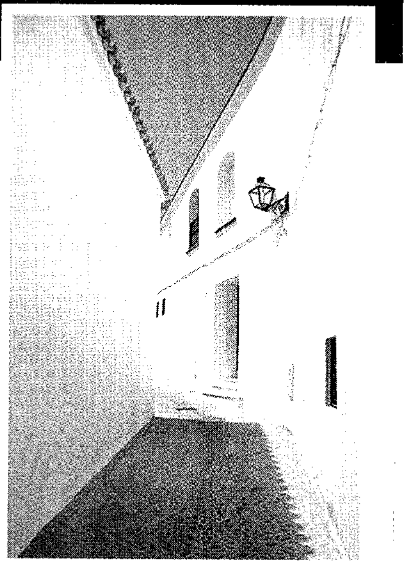
Called the gateway to the Pueblos Blancos, the town of **Arcos de la Frontera** stands atop a sheer cliff alongside the Guadalete River. Arcos was an important Muslim stronghold during the Middle Ages, but like most of the Pueblos Blancos, it is a blend of many cultures. The terrace of the Parador of Arcos provides a commanding vantage point, with views almost to the sea. The hotel's Andalucian touches include an interior courtyard, spacious tiled rooms, and a restaurant serving many local fish and game stews and a sampling menu of specialties.

Grazalema is the highest municipality in Cádiz, and the entire township sits within the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park. A UNESCO-designated biosphere, the nearly 128,000-acre nature reserve is home to many rare species of flora and fauna, including cork oak and Spanish fir trees, Egyptian mongoose and red deer, and some distinctive varieties of birds to delight ornithologists, like peregrine falcons and golden eagles. The city center—considered one of the loveliest examples of the Pueblos Blancos—preserves its Muslim and Roman heritage, and features an impressive Roman fountain.

One of the oldest towns in Spain, **Ronda**, in the Málaga province, boasts a storied history of romanticism. The city walls and gates date to the thirteenth century, and successive conquests left their marks—memorialized in the archeological museum housed in a former palace. The Parador bears the restored façade of the old City Hall, and three bridges (from three different eras) span the ravine that divides the city. Independent and proud, Ronda is most of all a place of refuge (Orson Welles found solace here).

The best seasons to visit Los Pueblos Blancos are spring and fall. The climate is mild and the olive groves and indigenous trees are verdant and aromatic. As with all the Pueblos Blancos, culture and countryside combine to make this a truly memorable part of Spain.





CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: ALCALÁ DEL VALLE ©EDWIN VAN WIJK; ARCOS DE LA FRONTERA ALLEYWAY ©MARCO CINALLI; RONDA IMAGE COURTESY OF SPAIN TOURIST OFFICE

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for deliberately covering it up. Zola was tried for criminal libel, and at his trial Clemenceau eloquently addressed what Mathieu had always seen was the problem: "Above all beware of this line of the reasoning . . . : 'It is possible that Dreyfus was convicted illegally, but it was justly done; that is enough.' . . . It is a serious error. . . . See to it that the supremacy of the law is undisputed, and through the law rid our hearts of this respect for reasons of state that is absurd in a democracy." (Zola was convicted, and fled the country, until the government fell and a pardon arrived.)

At last, the appeals worked their way to the top of the French courts, and a second Dreyfus court-martial was ordered. Dreyfus was snatched from his parched exile and brought home. Ignorant through his long isolation that anyone outside of his immediate family was even aware of his martyrdom, he sat down in his prison cell at Rennes, where the new court-martial was to take place, and read the transcripts of the secondary trials, and discovered that men of accomplishment had risked their welfare for his vindication. He wrote later, "A deep feeling of gratitude and admiration arose in my heart for all the courageous men, scholars and workers, great or humble, who had thrown themselves valiantly into the struggle for the triumph of justice and truth, to uphold principles which are the legacy of humanity."

The fix was still in, of course, and, despite the overwhelming evidence, Dreyfus was convicted again—but with a reference to "extenuating circumstances." This was what psychiatrists used to call "a cry for help." It meant that though the Army couldn't be seen to overturn its own verdict, it knew that it was wrong. The newly installed, liberal government immediately offered Dreyfus an amnesty, which would see him freed, albeit not yet reinstated in the Army, on the tacit condition that he not protest too hard any longer about his innocence.

Understandably, the activists who had risked their reputations on Dreyfus's vindication argued against assenting to an amnesty, and for continuing to appeal the case, despite the risk of further imprisonment. Poor Alfred was uncertain about the right way to act. It was left to the clear-headed Mathieu to convince them all that the immediate amnesty was as close to an admission of wrongdoing as you could hope to get. (Meanwhile, the right-wing loonies claimed that "extenuating circumstances" was really a reference to an "annotated memorandum"—the Obama birth certificate of the day—that contained notes in the Kaiser's handwriting gleefully savoring his Jew collaborator, a memorandum that couldn't be shown in open court out of fear that it could start another war.) Behind all this, the hopes for the upcoming Paris Exposition of 1900 were probably central to the government's panic. The Zola trial had awakened consciences—and a certain amount of French-bashing—in England and America. The new Exposition put the prestige of France, and income for Paris, on the line, and continued persecution of Dreyfus might have kept some foreigners away.

Dreyfus was lionized by the left, and went home to the grand apartment. Bit by bit, the entire web of injustice was unwoven: subsequent trials not only reinstated him in the Army but gave him (and Picquart) promotions and, eventually, the Légion d'Honneur, the highest decoration in France. In 1905, the Roman Catholic Church was more or less disestablished in France, and equality among Protestants, Catholics, and even Jews imposed, largely because of the grotesque role that the Church and *La Croix* had played in the persecution of Dreyfus. When the First World War broke out, Dreyfus went on to serve as an artillery colonel in Paris and at Verdun. He died in 1935, a man honored and respected both as a soldier for France and as a martyr for freedom.

In this sense, what's oddest about the Dreyfus affair is its unequivocally happy ending. A good man was the victim of a horrible injustice, decent people rallied to his side, the bad guys responsible for it were exposed, the good guy got to come home and was honored by the same people in the same place where he had been dishonored. If the beginning of the Dreyfus story is Maupassant, and the middle Kafka, the end is Victor Hugo, a victory of the romantic, progressive imagination: wrongs can be righted; in the long run things work out for the best. Dreyfus's restoration to bourgeois comfort was so complete that a famous Paris story has him saying placidly at a dinner party, when told about a rumored adulterous affair in his circle, "Well, what I always say is: where there's smoke, there's fire."

The trouble was that, like most happy endings, the happy ending was not the end. The good guys won in a way that only made the bad guys worse. As with Watergate, the immediate outcome of the affair gave a misleading impression of unanimity; in truth, while the good guys thought the other guys had absorbed it as a lesson, they had merely resented it as a defeat. Though Dreyfus won his place back, in 1908 he was the victim of an assassination attempt by a follower of Charles Maurass, who had succeeded Édouard Drumont as the leading authoritarian anti-Semite in France. In any modernized country, the backward-looking party will always tend toward resentment and grievance. The key is to keep the conservatives feeling that they are an alternative party of modernity. (This was Disraeli's great achievement, as it was, much later, de Gaulle's.) When the conservative party comes to see itself as unfairly marginalized, it becomes a party of pure reaction, which is what happened to the French right after Dreyfus. Instead of purging the anti-Semites, people on the right decided to rally behind them. They came to hate the idea of the Republic itself. When Maurass was sentenced for collaboration after the Second World War, he cried, "It's the revenge of Dreyfus!" It wasn't true. But Vichy had been four long years of the revenge of Drumont.

Three "readings" of the affair, all by Jews, have long contested its meaning; Begley raises all three. The first is Theodore Herzl's, which gave birth to modern Zionism. Herzl had been present at the Dreyfus degradation on that January day, as a journalist for a Viennese paper, and if one moment engraved his sense that Jews could never find a safe home in Europe this was it: "It has been established that justice could be refused to a Jew for the sole reason that he was a Jew." Dreyfus, the perfect case of attempted assimilation, "signifies a strategic position which . . . is already lost." This insight, repeated and made programmatic in the Zionist project, was seemingly vindicated by what happened during the Second World War, when the members of the Dreyfus family, who had fought for France so often and so patriotically, were, like all French Jews, forced into hiding; Alfred's favorite granddaughter, Madeline, a Resistance fighter, was deported by

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the Vichy state and died at Auschwitz, age twenty-five.

Herzl's reading was that the affair marked the end of a credible idea of assimilation; Marcel Proust's was that it marked the end of a credible idea of aristocracy. The Dreyfus affair acts as a kind of earthquake in "Remembrance of Things Past," destroying Proust's belief in a natural merger of the educated middles, mostly Jewish, and the aristocratic heights. Proust's ideal was the aesthete's version of the progressive dream, Manet's version of Mill: the bourgeois would be encircled by the wise and the witty and the wellborn, and their petty prejudices would fall. This happy merger of intellect and grace, symbolized in Proust by the figure of Swann, the Jewish flâneur with a love for Vermeer, is, as Proust says, "retarded" by the affair. It largely accounts for the difference in tone between the melancholy but high-hearted world of the early chapters in Proust's series, where Swann is free to roam between the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and the demimonde while still being a trusted Jew among the Boulevard Jews like Proust's family, and the straitened and suspicious social circumstances in the last books. Proust had always expected his aristocrats to think stupidly; he just didn't expect so many to behave so shabbily.

Yet these sad readings are not the only plausible ones. Léon Blum, the Socialist politician who began his public career during the affair and, in 1936, became the Prime Minister of France, insisted that the Dreyfus affair was the moment that truly established the emancipation of the Jews, and their right to play a full role as citizens—it was what allowed a Jew like him to become Prime Minister. (The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, born Jewish in Lithuania, liked to quote his father: "A country that tears itself apart to defend the honor of a small Jewish captain is somewhere worth going.") The real meaning of the affair, for the French left, lay in its vindication of the rights of man and of an ideal of cosmopolitan citizenship, open to all. Certainly, France's republican governments have been far more inclined to entrust Jews with power than any other modern state. After Blum, there was Mendès-France, the most admired Prime Minister of the Fourth Republic, and today, in the Fifth Republic, the President, his foreign minister, and his national-security adviser are all, by Vichy's definition and most others, Jews. In this view, the persistence of anti-Semitism is not an argument against cosmopolitan citizenship; it is an argument against the persistence of anti-Semitism.

Begley, for his part, asks why Dreyfus wanted to go back into the Army that had betrayed him. As well ask why Rosa Parks didn't just stop riding buses. The Dreyfus family had suffered as Jews and understood that they suffered as Jews; they still lived out their lives as French men and women, and had no ambition except to continue to live their lives as French men and women. How can French Jews accept French law and lore, and not be haunted by the Drancy internment camp? It is a condition of being modern that our double and triple identities look weird from the outside but are the only kinds that feel authentic from the inside. The passionately nationalist Québécois who listens exclusively to Metallica and AC/DC; the Muslim fundamentalist with the satellite dish—from outside, we wonder how they reconcile the contradictions. But they don't have to reconcile the contradictions in order to cope with reality. The contradictions are themselves the form that a reconciliation with reality takes.

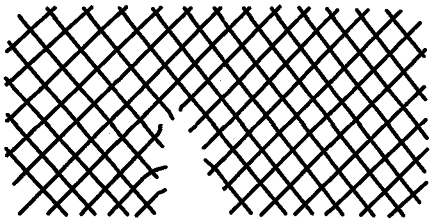
Of all the readings of the Dreyfus case, the sanest still seems to be the reading of the French socialists and liberals, almost none of them Jewish, who first took it up passionately: an innocent man had been railroaded by villains, who took advantage of ethnic prejudice in a Catholic country. It was done in defiance of the plain rules and traditions and procedures of the country's own military order and judicial system, and had to be remedied by them. After some time, though with less clarity than one would have liked, and with more fudge around the edges than was ideal, this was done. The lesson to be learned was the lesson that Clemenceau had tried to teach the jury at Zola's trial. The urge to protect the nation from its enemies by going around the corner to get them is natural, but what you get is usually not the enemies, and, going around the corner, you bump into something worse. Breaking the law to defend the nation ends up breaking the nation. Sometimes long stories have short morals. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
An audio interview with Adam Gopnik.

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Year of the Flood, *by Margaret Atwood (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $26).* In her new novel, Atwood returns to the post-apocalyptic mode of her 2003 book, “Oryx and Crake,” with the story of two women isolated as a genetically engineered plague destroys mankind. Both women have been members of God’s Gardeners, an eco-cult that has long prophesied retribution for society’s apathy and selfishness, and while they wait for signs of life from the outside they spend their days remembering past loves and not-quite-healed wounds. Atwood’s gallows humor is appealing—one of the women joins the cult in order to escape the abusive manager of a human-meat burger joint—and her complex characterization allows the novel’s environmental, Biblical, and sociological themes to intertwine seamlessly.

Gourmet Rhapsody, *by Muriel Barbery, translated from the French by Alison Anderson (Europa; $15).* This trifle of a tale preceded Barbery’s best-seller “The Elegance of the Hedgehog” in France but follows it in publication here, which is rather like serving the amuse-bouche after the entrée. An eminent and ruthless food critic lies dying, struggling to pinpoint the one flavor from his youth that constitutes “the first and ultimate truth” of his life. His lucid memories—of his first taste of sashimi (“a milky density unknown even by clouds”) and of Scotch (“My organs no longer existed”), for example—are intercut with jejune plaints from a parade of figures, including the children he acknowledges he never loved, the wife he thinks of as a beautiful object, and, wincingly, his cat. Still, Barbery’s invocations of gustatory pleasure are seductive. Biting into a freshly plucked tomato, the critic exults in “this plump little globe unleashing a flood of nature inside us: a tomato, an adventure.”



Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *by Lori D. Ginzberg (Hill & Wang; $25).* In this deft biography, Ginzberg firmly roots Stanton—the first American to synthesize arguments for women’s equality in employment, income, property, custody, and divorce—in the complex swell of nineteenth-century middle-class reform, and reveals her thornier, less egalitarian side. An abolitionist more out of political convenience than conviction, she not only abandoned the movement for black male suffrage after the Civil War to focus on white women’s suffrage but increasingly made vitriolic attacks on immigrants, the working class, and African-Americans in her writing and speeches. The consequences of Stanton’s racism and élitism were “deep and hurtful,” Ginzberg says, and she attributes the continuing difficulty of incorporating race and class differences into gender politics, in large part, to Stanton’s mixed legacy.

The Fallen Sky, *by Christopher Cokinos (Tarcher; $27.95).* In 1894, fifteen years before his storied expedition to the North Pole, Robert Peary crossed a treacherous expanse of ice in Greenland in search of another prize: a massive meteorite laden with rare metals from outer space. In this hefty, industrious book, Cokinos retraces Peary’s steps, and those of other meteor “obsessives,” in an idiosyncratic hunt of his own. The book pairs, sometimes awkwardly, exciting tales of scientific adventure and unself-conscious rumination—particularly on the subject of the author’s failed first marriage, the pain of which, he insists, is “part and parcel of the hunt, *my* hunt, for the meteorite hunters.” As often as not, though, the original meteorite hunters had a more prosaic view of their quests. Peary, for instance, had a simple desire for glory and riches; when he finally found that meteorite, which the local Inuits had dubbed Woman (another, nearby, they called Dog), he called it “the brown mass.”

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THE ART WORLD

ABSTRACTION FIGURE

Kandinsky at the Guggenheim.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

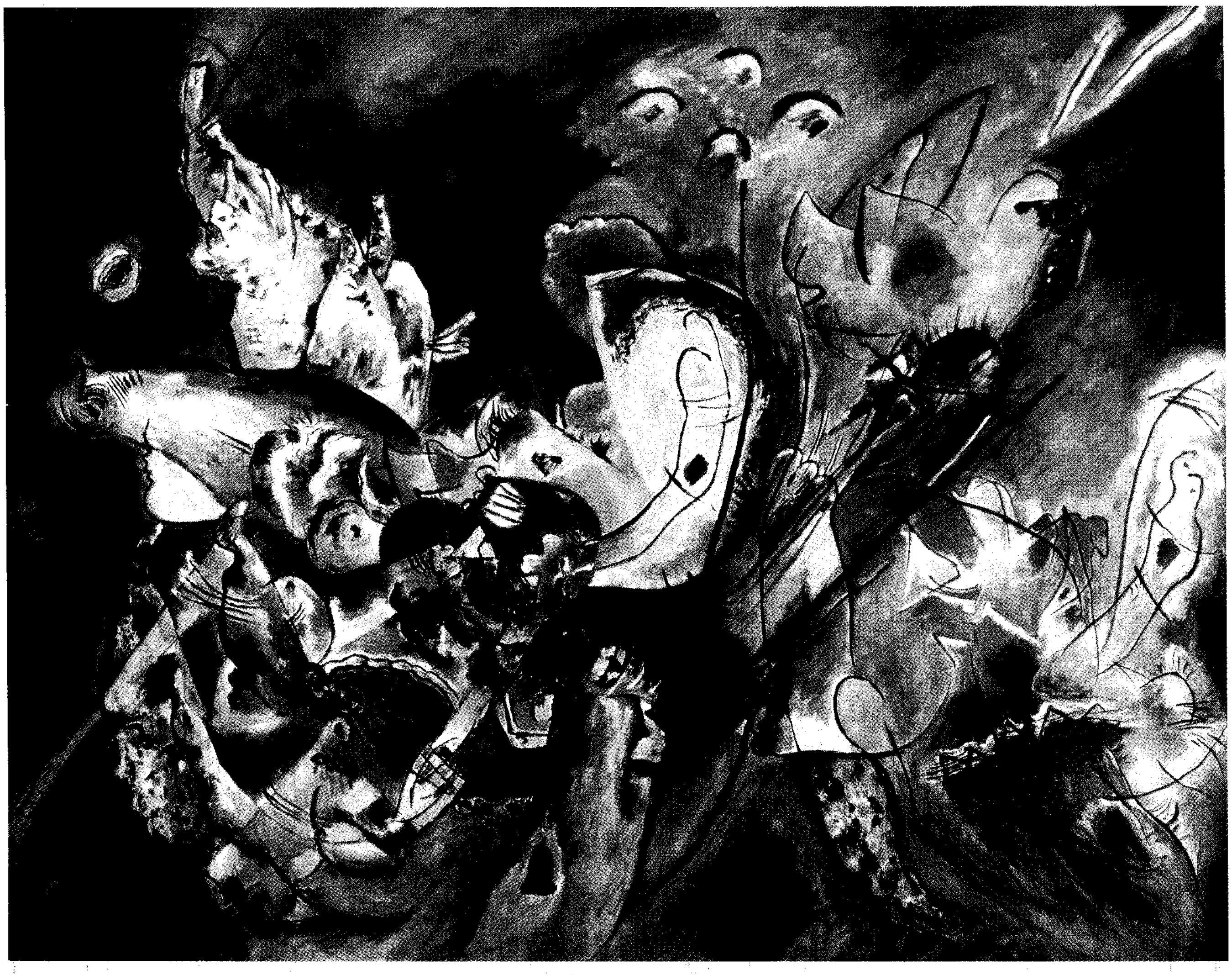
The early going in the Vasily Kandinsky retrospective, at the Guggenheim Museum, is gruellingly pleasurable, with splurges of paint as vertiginous as Frank Lloyd Wright's building. It is a kind of apotheosis, seeing this work—mainly from the years 1909-14, when its creator invented and road-tested abstract art—in this museum, whose founding collection centered on Kandinsky, and whose architecture ratified his spirit of shoot-the-works modernity. Not for the first time, but with extra verve, the spiral ramp acts as a time machine, whirling us back into years when it seemed that paint on a brush could change the world. The feeling may begin to fade, like the dream that it always was, when you're out on Fifth Avenue again, but a certain queasiness will likely accompany you home. Kandinsky's best art, which climaxes in the period of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, demands more indulgent fortitude, amounting almost to physical courage, than that of any of the other half-dozen greatest artists of the early twentieth century. His artistic personality, at once narcissistic and hectoring, tempts us to shrug him off. I still do in the case of most of his later work, with its fustian arrays of glyphs and ciphers, which crowd the picture plane like bugs peppering a windshield. But Kandinsky's excesses make him easy to underrate, too. He was really something.

Kandinsky was born to an haut-bourgeois family in Moscow in 1866, and moved soon afterward to Odessa—he was a near-contemporary of Toulouse-Lautrec, Seurat, and Munch, and fourteen years older than Picasso. He was thirty when he started painting, after training in law and economics, and forty-three when, in 1909, he hit his stride among the Expressionists in and around Munich, with whom, in 1911, he formed the Blue Rider group, named for one of his paintings. His art has nothing important in common with Cubism, Futurism, or the other breakout movements of the epoch. His independence of Picasso made him a crucial influence on the efforts to blow open the knitted pictorial space of Parisian modernism—first of Joan Miró and later of Arshile Gorky and the Abstract Expressionists. The formal difference is apparent in Kandinsky's shadings of fragmented shapes: they stay flat, rarely suggesting the outward and inward tilts, the bumps and hollows, of Cubism. Any illusion of internal space is usually an effect of the "push and pull" (a famous formulation by the artist and teacher Hans Hofmann) of cool and warm colors, or the front-and-back dynamic of linear designs overlaid on colored grounds.

Kandinsky's ambitious theories of abstraction, promulgated in his book "On the Spiritual in Art," published in 1911, constitute a dicier legacy. Saturated in Theosophist mysticism, eccentric takes on science, and, most of all, accounts of his own subjective process, the theories relate only tangentially to the two most cogent innovators of abstract painting, Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian. Each of them found a way, by reduction, to establish fundamental forms that yield firm and clear impressions. Kandinsky remained, at heart, a romantic idealist of a nineteenth-century Germanic sort, enraptured by the tumult of his feelings. His preservation of that cast of mind happened to keep alight a slow-burning fuse for Abstract Expressionism, which reoriented modern painting to dramas of personal emotion.

Kandinsky married a cousin in 1892. In 1896, he was thunderstruck by two works of art—a Monet "Haystack" and a performance of Richard Wagner's "Lohengrin"—and moved to Munich, whose art schools were magnets for Russian and Eastern European students. An inheritance from an uncle, in 1901, of a Moscow apartment building staked him to the comfortable means of a rentier. His first striking works are illustrational and bejewelled-looking fairy-tale paintings, inspired by folk art and in key with Jugendstil decoration. In 1903, he took up with a student from a painting class he taught, Gabriele Münter, a lifelong Fauvist given to chromatic landscapes. Fleeing his marriage, he travelled with Münter restlessly throughout Europe, spending a year in Paris, and in Tunisia. In 1905, his brother died in the Russo-Japanese War, and Kandinsky went back to Odessa, briefly, during the revolution of that year. A painting by Münter from 1912 (not in the show) conveys the feverish charms of a bohemian ménage: Kandinsky, neatly bearded and bespectacled, in shorts, raising one hand in a peremptory gesture, holds forth to a female friend after dinner in a room decorated with hot-colored little pictures and indistinct objects. It's stirring to imagine Kandinsky's intense conversations with his Blue Rider colleagues, including Franz Marc, Alexei Jawlensky, and Lyonel Feininger, none of whom followed him across the frontier of abstraction, perhaps as much not to risk comparison with his titanic talent as from fidelity to nature.

The English art critic David Sylvester noted that the works of Kandinsky's great period offer "nothing tangible for us to hold on to; it is as if we were in a small boat out in a rocky sea." The way to enjoy them, for as long as you can stand it, is to move in close and give yourself over to their waves and waterspouts, "as if you had got out of the rocking boat and decided to swim for it." Avoid, if you can, reading cartoon imagery into their fortuitous shapes. "As soon as we look at the picture, it starts making faces at us," Sylvester complained. (A terrific painting of 1914, "Improvisation 35," is ruined for me by my eye's insuperable conviction that there is a football helmet in the middle of it.) The adventure begins with imagery of landscapes and horsemen, and disintegrates into impulsive brushwork and clangorous color. One of Kandinsky's last halfway representational pictures, "Impression III (Concert)" (1911), shows vestigial figures leaning into a tsunami of yellow—the impact of the artist's first exposure to the music of Arnold Schoenberg, who became a close friend. Kan-



Kandinsky's "Overcast" (1917): the tumult of his feelings kept alight a slow-burning fuse for Abstract Expressionism.

COURTESY STATE TRETYAKOV GALLERY, MOSCOW/© 2009 ARS, NY/ADAGP, PARIS

dinsky set great value on a supposed kinship of painting and music, and the result was art that, like music, has meaning only through time. The time belongs to us, as actively coöperative viewers. The paintings make no sense except while we play along, responding to passages in what the art historian Meyer Schapiro called "a random flow of private and incommunicable associations."

With the onset of the First World War, Kandinsky became an enemy alien in Germany. He moved with Münter to Switzerland and then, alone, to his Moscow apartment house. He met Nina Andreevskaya, the twenty-year-old daughter of a deceased tsarist officer, and married her, in 1917. After the Revolution, he participated, rather gingerly, in the country's galvanic avant-garde and held various positions in the alphabet soup of fledgling Soviet cultural institutions. During a spell of making art only intermittently, he created what for me is his most extraordinary painting, "Overcast" (1917). It develops visceral forms in an uncharacteristically sensual, infolding space, with bright colors signalling from a general collapse into darkness. "Overcast" is so akin to the poetry of anxiety in Gorky's masterpieces of the nineteen-forties that I fancy an electric arc across the intervening decades.

In 1921, Kandinsky moved with Nina to Berlin, where the art world embraced him. He soon became a prominent teacher at the Bauhaus, in Weimar and, later, Dessau; in 1928 he took German citizenship. He could luxuriate in social and professional contacts with leading lights—including membership in an exhibiting group, the Blue Four, with Paul Klee, Feininger, and Jawlensky—but his style calcified into tricky panoplies of stock modernistic forms, more suited to punchy graphic art than to the fascinations of painting. Though Kandinsky's inventiveness never flagged, as a sideshow at the Guggenheim of his unquenchably lively drawings confirms, his sense of "inner necessity" (a key term in his theory of art) wandered. With busy, compulsively tidy compositions, in increasingly sugary colors, he became his own leading imitator. (The show may rewardingly be viewed backward, from the top of the Guggenheim's ramp: dispiriting fussiness giving way gradually, and then suddenly, to energies as thrilling as an Easter sunrise.) Kandinsky abandoned Germany in 1933. Living outside Paris, with Nina, until his death, in 1944, he added no lustre to his high repute. It seems that he considered emigrating to New York. He should have. The welcome mat was spread at the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, which became the Guggenheim. Our eager metropolis might have recharged his inspiration, as it did Mondrian's. At the least, we would possess some delectable anecdotes. ♦

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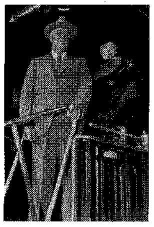

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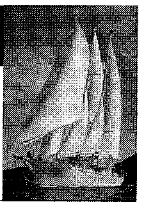


THE THEATRE

ENEMIES: A LOVE STORY

Daniel Goldfarb on a postwar revenge plot.

BY HILTON ALS

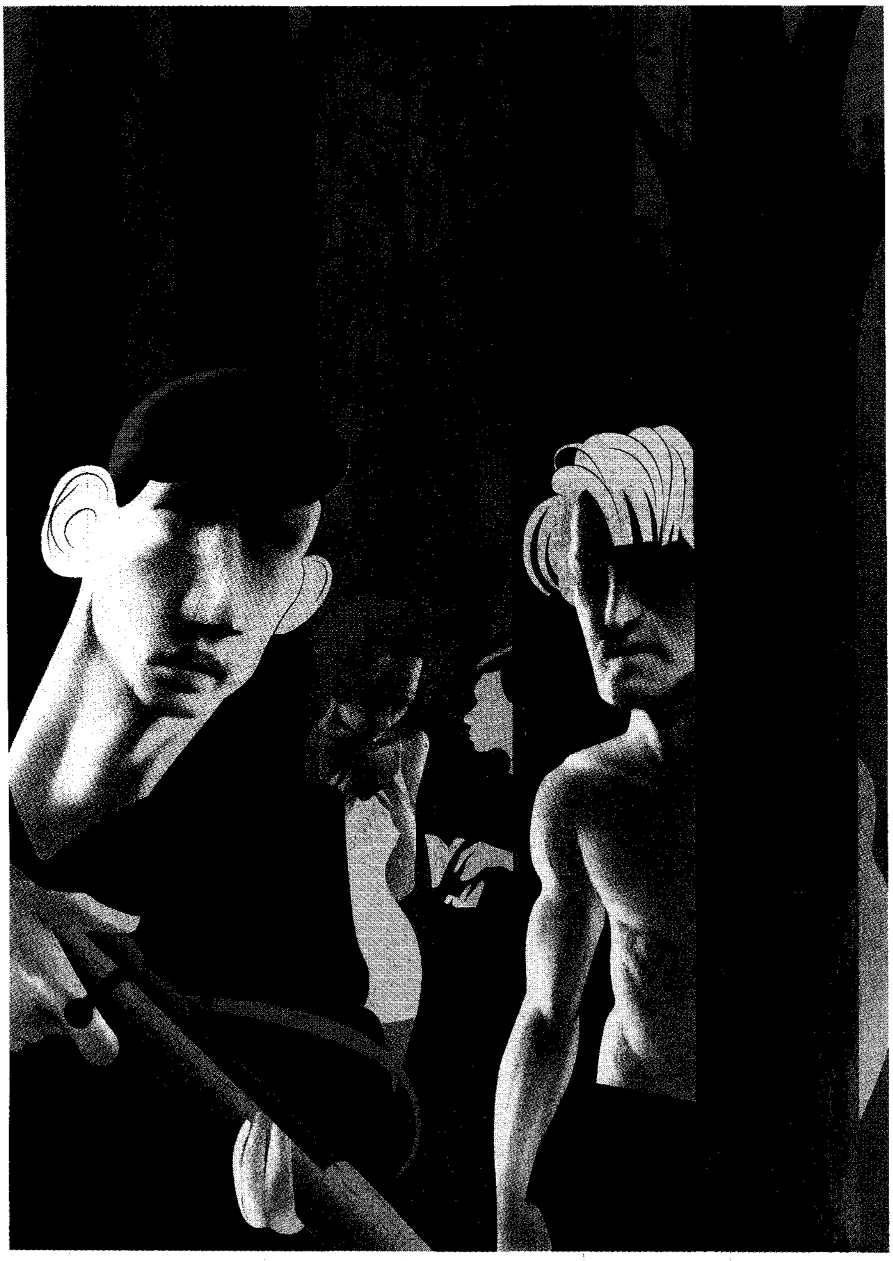
In the perhaps too orderly world of Daniel Goldfarb's imagination, interesting things can happen, but not when the author's in control. A literary sprinter by nature—his first acts have an almost staccato rhythm, as the absurdities pile up—Goldfarb sags when he has to go the distance. It's as if some sense of duty were compelling him to pump his plays up, to push them through second acts and beyond the bounds of their natural, modest lives. This is a drag not only for the audience but for his characters as well. Too often, the thirty-six-year-old Goldfarb confuses the theatre with the lecture hall. This didacticism makes his new play, "The Retributionists" (at Playwrights Horizons), feel both empty and bloated; and it ends up trivializing what would have been a riveting story, trapping the actors in a narrative that doesn't encourage freedom, artistic or otherwise.

Anika Stoller (Margarita Levieva) is a beautiful twenty-one-year-old woman with wavy brown hair and a solid body. It's 1946. She's in a hotel room in Paris. Her bed is covered in a thick blanket. The room has a window that looks out on Notre-Dame. There is a series of knocks at the door—a secret code. A man enters tentatively. He and the woman embrace, then share a moment of silence. The man is Jascha Pinsker (Adam Rothenberg). Like Anika, he's a Lithuanian Jew who survived the war. Dressed in a leather jacket and scuffed boots, the thirty-something Jascha comes across as the prototypical aging bad boy: moody and tough, but also vulnerable, poetic. He reveals his soft side by degrees.

Toward the end of their first scene together, Jascha hands Anika a gift—a box of her favorite pastries. She can't open the package quickly enough, and she consumes the treats with childish glee; when she offers Jascha a taste, it seems almost an afterthought. Anika is no stereotypical ingénue, all simpering and pleading, with a need to please. She doesn't subsume her appetites—any of them—in order to appear nicer than she is. And this makes her engaging to watch—for a while. Levieva is a sumptuous-looking young actress, and she may flower into one we want to see time and again. But, under the direction of Leigh Silverman, she overplays the subtext of Anika's craven self-interest and hopped-up activism—she's a more vulgar Susan Traherne, from David Hare's 1978 drama "Plenty," all balls-to-the-wall bravado and exaggerated political passion.

In any case, what is Jascha doing in a little hotel room in Paris with this live wire of a woman? Turns out that he and Anika are old friends, former lovers. But that's in the past—or should be. Now Anika is engaged to Dov Kaplinsky (Adam Driver), who heads the Plan, an underground Jewish revenge plot, whose purpose is to kill one German for every Jew who died during the war. (It is a pity for Goldfarb that his effort hit the boards at the same time that Quentin Tarantino scored a success with "Inglourious Basterds," which covers similar territory in a much more surprising way.) Jascha has come to Anika's room to receive his assignment. Anika informs him that, thanks to his blond hair and pale skin, he should be able to "pass" in Germany; he is being dispatched to Nuremberg, where he'll seek work in a bakery that supplies a German prisoner-of-war camp. Once ensconced, he'll slather arsenic on the bread of their former tormenters, leaving them to die like rats.

As improbable as this sounds, Goldfarb based his story on historical events. But that still doesn't make you feel as though "The Retributionists" had any real blood coursing through it. A subplot involving Dov and another of his lovers, Dinchka Fried (Cristin Milioti), feels even more stilted than Anika and Jascha's exchanges, despite the heat that Driver brings to his early scenes. It's difficult to tell if Goldfarb is really engaged by this material, or if he wrote the



The avengers: Driver, Levieva, Milioti, and Rothenberg in "The Retributionists."

ANDRÉ CARRILHO

play out of a sense of responsibility. In his other work, he occasionally manages to live up to his enthusiasm for such writers as Philip Roth and Woody Allen—creators who know a thing or two about letting the imagination speak for itself. In his 1999 comedy, "Adam Baum and the Jew Movie," a Jewish Hollywood producer named Samuel Baum (based on Samuel Goldwyn) hires a Gentile writer named Garfield Hampson, Jr. (based on Ring Lardner, Jr.), to write a movie about "the Jewish experience," in 1946. The dialogue crackles and groans with humor: about power, about the immigrant experience, about ethnic insecurity, and about male privilege. Samuel tells Gar, as he calls him, that he's disappointed in his first draft and explains what he was hoping for. Gar responds:

GAR: So, you want a fantasy movie about anti-Semitism. . . . With an American title, benign anti-Semites, what else, a night-club number with Lena Horne?
SAMUEL: It wouldn't hurt.
GAR: Jesus.
SAMUEL: Actually, there really is one more thing.
GAR: More. You want me to change more.
SAMUEL: It's just an itsy bitsy little thing.
GAR: What?
SAMUEL: Well, the Jewish family, they're too . . . Never mind, I'll get to that later.
GAR: Mr. Baum. I feel America is ready for a realistic portrait of what it means to be Jewish and suffer from anti-Semitism.
SAMUEL: I answer you in two words: im possible.
GAR: Then what do you want this picture to be?
SAMUEL: Like some of my past successes.
GAR: Can you be more specific?
SAMUEL: I don't know, can you try and make it more like "Withering Heights"?
GAR: "Wuthering Heights"? No.

Samuel is not only punishing Gar for his privileged life—his Waspiness, his education—he's showing him how power works. It is controlled and defined by men like Samuel Baum—the money guys—not by writers.

Goldfarb explored similar complexities—he's especially good at delineating male relationships—in his 2000 play, "Modern Orthodox." In one scene, two men meet in a kosher restaurant in midtown Manhattan. Ben is a secular Jew, a "finance guy," meeting with Hershel, a twenty-seven-year-old Orthodox Jew who sells diamonds. (Ben's in the market for an engagement ring.) Within moments, Goldfarb has exposed Ben's prejudices; indeed, he has exposed many of the prejudices that the secular world holds against the religiously conservative. In most of his work, Goldfarb seems to be asking, What defines Jewishness? And what makes Jewishness the cultural norm, while Jews themselves are reviled? These are big questions, though, and he rarely has the stamina to see them through.

In the end, he bores us out of liking "The Retributionists" with a long and turgid second act that doesn't really contribute to what he established in the first. He wraps everything up with conversations that we can't be bothered to follow, because they all feel so incidental. His characters never escape from the schema he has prepared for them or take on lives of their own. Jascha gains access to the bakery in Nuremberg, but things don't go according to plan. Anika ends up pregnant, but by then we don't really care about her hopes and dreams. We just want the actors to stop acting and Goldfarb to understand that until he can silence his inner don, the promise in his work will be overwhelmed by the chalk talk. ♦

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From the Dallas Morning News.

"She feels to have a chance to unhorse Perry, she's got to come into the state and make a full court press," Buchanan said. "She's coming out with both six-guns blazing, so it looks like it's going to be a rough fight."

ON TELEVISION

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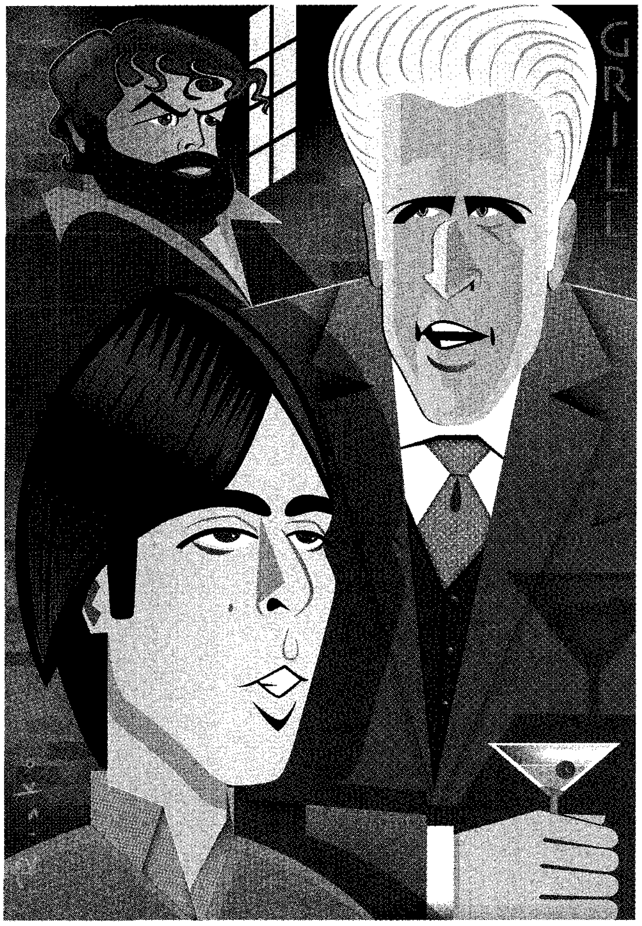
HBO's new comedy about a writer turned private eye.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

Chick lit—the range of fiction by women about contemporary city life, friendships, sex, jobs, climbing out of the wreckage of youthful dreams—gets a lot less respect than the male equivalent, which people tend to approach as if it were automatically more artful, more *written*. Women write "thinly veiled accounts"; men write "romans à clef." Women writers may have a room of their own, but men who thrash around in front of the mirror and record their every failure, humiliation, moue, and excretion for an audience's consumption still own the house, even if all they do in it is lie on the couch—and then write about it.

The work of Jonathan Ames, who created the new HBO series "Bored to Death," lies in this vein of self-fascination and self-conscious inertia. (The show débuted on September 20th, after the season première of "Curb Your Enthusiasm," back, finally, after an absence of two years.) Ames has written novels and essays and has performed in the storytelling forum the Moth and in a one-man Off Off Broadway show that he wrote called "Oedipussy." He is sometimes tagged as one of the "Jonathans of Brooklyn," the other two being the novelists Jonathan Safran Foer and Jonathan Lethem. Aside from being successful, prodigious fixtures of the New York literary scene, the three have little in common. Foer and Lethem take risks in their writing; Ames takes risks with his physical self and his public self. He's into boxing—actually doing it, not just "appreciating" it—and there's a video on YouTube, shot earlier this month, of Ames onstage at the Brooklyn Book Festival, being paddled by the comedian David Cross while bent over Cross's lap. (It was part of a showcase for the Happy Ending Music and Reading Series, wherein reader-performers take risks not usually associated with standing behind a lectern in front of an audience and reciting your finished, polished, safely enpaginated work.) Ames clearly likes to put himself out there, partly for the adrenaline rush, partly for the material, and no doubt partly to figure out who he is. That seems to be his mission, or at least his preoccupation: the first lines of almost all his books start with the word "I."



The three amigos of Jonathan Ames's "Bored to Death."

ROBERT RISKO

"Bored to Death" grew out of a story of the same name that Ames published in the magazine *McSweeney's*. A first-person narrative by a writer named Jonathan Ames—a "periodic alcoholic" who has just stopped drinking again—the story is about Jonathan's attempt to scoop himself out of his lethargy and find a sense of purpose, even if it's one that's built on falseness. Taking a page, as it were, from the detective novels he loves, he decides to become a detective himself, and puts an ad on Craigslist offering his services. The writing of the story is unenlighteningly detailed and numbingly atonal—possibly in order to illustrate how dull writers can be. A typical passage: "Anyway, I got a thrill at posting the ad, but it was a short-lived thrill. For the first day, I would go and look at my ad, admiring my own handiwork, laughing to myself, wondering if something might happen, almost as if I checked it out enough times, other people would. But then, after about a day, the thrill wore off. It was one more ridiculous thing in a ridiculous life, and, of course, no one called."

As boring—deliberately or otherwise—as the story "Bored to Death" is, its complications and the narrator's straightforward voice lend themselves to the screen. In the HBO series, Ames has combined his writing self with his performing self and created something that is about ego without seeming egotistical. (For one thing, Ames does not appear in the show.) Not all the tweaks in the plot work well, but most of the series' flaws are masked by the excellent casting and the good writing for three central characters: Jonathan (Jason Schwartzman, of Wes Anderson's "Rushmore" and David O. Russell's "I ♥ Huckabees"); his best friend, Ray (Zach Galifianakis, an appealingly bearish comedian); and George (Ted Danson), the editor-in-chief of a slick New York magazine that Jonathan sometimes writes for. In the story, Jonathan becomes a phony private detective in order to escape the tedium of sobriety—of facing life as it is. In the series, he's trying to escape the difficulty of writing his second novel. (The real Jonathan has written several novels.) There's more than a shade of difference between those jumping-off points, with the second one offering more comic possibilities. And in fact, from the very beginning the series has a comic tone that raises it above Ames's plodding original story.

At the start of the first episode, Jonathan is standing in front of his apartment building, watching moving men fill a truck and hugging himself for comfort: his girlfriend is leaving him. The movers are Israeli, and Jonathan remarks on the unexpectedness of movers being Jewish. One of them says, "What are you, another self-hating New York Jew?" "Mm-hmm," Jonathan replies, as blandly as if someone had asked him to confirm the time. What's funny about Jonathan is that his cluelessness about life is so pronounced it might as well be a third arm. He's empathetic yet selfish, sweet and uncalculating yet infuriating. Guileless and pure, he doesn't know any better than to tell his ex-girlfriend, Suzanne, that he misses the life she made for him: "I'm living like an animal. I have no toilet paper, no food, no toothpaste." (Suzanne is played by Olivia Thirlby, for what it's worth, which isn't much; all the female characters in the series are underdeveloped, and none of the actresses stand out, except for Kristen Wiig, of "Saturday Night Live," who is a client of Jonathan's in one episode.) Schwartzman, a slight man with a flat affect and a speaking voice that's a light-tenor monotone, pulls off this self-absorption—not with his ex but with the audience. As was the case with the character he played in "Rushmore," an oddball prep-school student with a rich inner life, viewers can identify with him, because although he's an underachiever he's smart and full of desire. He just can't get it together.

And anytime you feel inclined to smack the emo boy out of Jonathan, you're distracted by Danson's sensationally hilarious performance as a flamboyantly narcissistic late-middle-aged quester (a quester with a cushy life style; he asks someone, "What's a Subaru?"), and by Galifianakis's comic-book artist, whose understanding of relationships is stuck at the comic-book level. "Bored to Death" is best appreciated as a buddy picture. Jonathan is a low-energy thumb-sucker, Ray is a grump, and George is heedlessly enthusiastic about mixing it up with Jonathan once he finds out that he's been dabbling in detective work. George is also bored to death, and wants something to make him feel young again. In one episode, Jonathan is closing in on a woman who has slept with and blackmailed a married man, and he pretends to be interested in her himself, so that he can coerce her into giving up the incriminating videotape she made. George wants in on the action—it gives him an excuse to skip a dinner honoring Gay Talese, and anyway, he says, "Gay Talese would want me to do something like this." He and Ray and Jonathan stop first at a spy store in the Village. (Jonathan has already proved his helplessness in the face of gear: in an earlier episode, when he was embroiled with some Russian gangsters, Ray gave him brass knuckles. Jonathan held the weapon with his fingertips, then threw it at his target. And it actually got the job done.) While the others are shopping for sleuthy stuff, George is in the background, dancing and mugging, entranced by seeing his image on several closed-circuit cameras at once—he can't get enough of himself.

Danson and Galifianakis steal the show, partly by design. Schwartzman's character is tentative, provisional, making himself up as he goes along; he's like a piece of writing as it's being written—by definition, a work in progress. To balance out the portrait, Ames also uses him as an instrument for making fun of writers' self-regard. In one scene, the director Jim Jarmusch, who has asked to meet with Jonathan for a possible rewrite job, tells him that he liked his novel. "Dark, funny, perverted, beautiful," he says. "You must really suffer from the terrifying clarity of your vision." Jonathan replies, in all seriousness, "Thank you. I do suffer. Thank you." All three men here are missing something, but, as absurd as they are, they're not just comic caricatures; they're the very real clowns you can see performing every day in New York City's media circus, whose three rings are Me, Myself, and I. ♦

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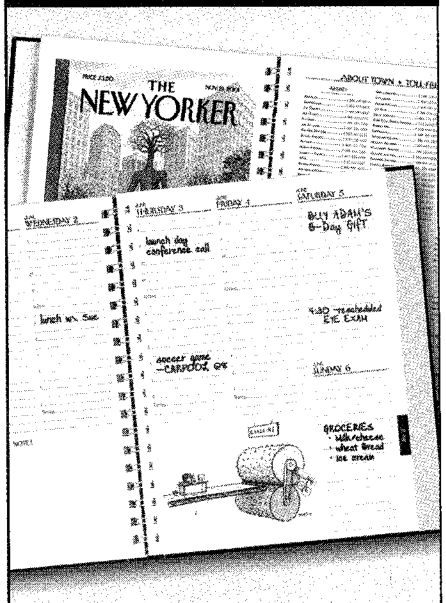

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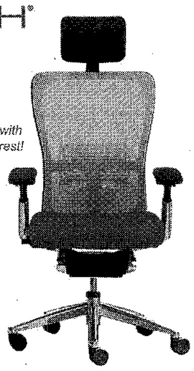

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

DRESSING UP

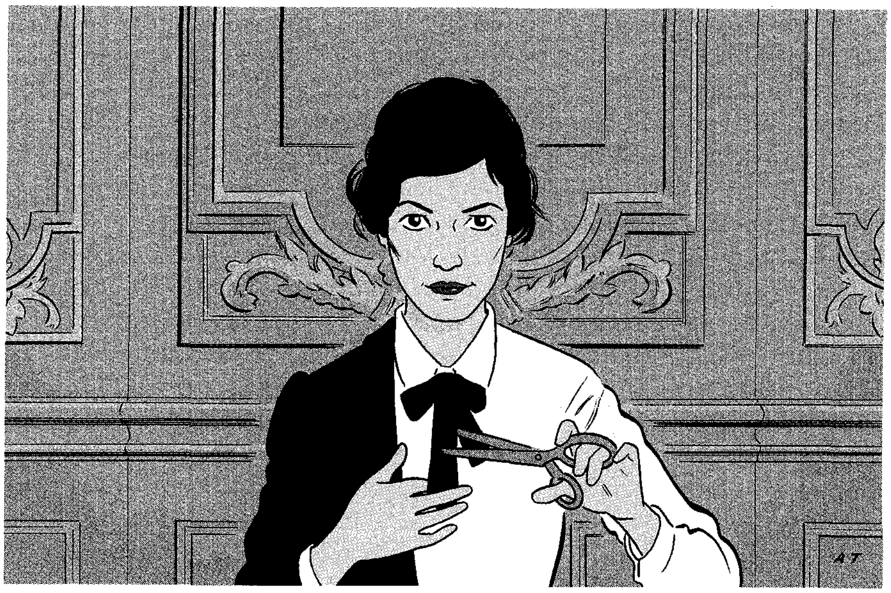
"Coco Before Chanel" and "Walt & El Grupo."

BY ANTHONY LANE

As the title implies, "Coco Before Chanel" is one of those films, like "Young Mr. Lincoln" or "Young Winston," which invite us to peek into the origins of the notable. These acts of preëmption are lured, by their nature, toward the "Aha!" moment—the point at which a future that we already know is neatly foretold in the present. Hence the closing scene of Barry Levinson's "Young Sherlock Holmes," in which the junior sleuth, viewed in profile, puts a pipe in his mouth and a deerstalker on his head for the first time, and begins to become himself. Hence, too, the maritime sequence in Anne Fontaine's new film, when Gabrielle Chanel (Audrey Tautou) gazes intently at fishermen, clad in dark tops, as they haul their nets onto the beach. Those jerseys! The way they hang! So simple! *Aha!*

The truth is that the mechanics of inspiration, however well verified, threaten to look gauche in the hands of the dramatizer; even "Shakespeare in Love" flowed more freely in the business of stagecraft than it did in the shots of a quill-clutching, beard-stroking Bard. The more tacit the hint, the less we are likely to smirk, and, to be fair, Fontaine—who co-wrote the screenplay with her sister Camille—proceeds wherever possible by the insertion of small clues. For every clunker ("What is this material?" Chanel asks, before taking a pair of scissors to a man's sweater and slicing it into a cardigan), there is a smattering of grace notes, as our heroine's environment leaves her with an echo of suggestion. Thus, at the start, in 1893, she is stranded by her father at an orphanage: a joyless experience, she claims, but something about it—the starched white glare of the nuns' cuffs and wimples, glimpsed in closeup—would seem to have lingered in her mind's eye.

From here, we hop fifteen years, to a provincial tavern, where Gabrielle, now a tetchy and man-resistant minx, sings for her supper; one of the numbers, with its refrain of "Coco at the Trocadero," becomes her trademark and bequeaths her a permanent name. She lives with Adrienne (Marie Gillain), who, while close in age, is actually her aunt. I spent the entire film under the impression that she was her sister, and, to complicate matters, Coco claims that "the aunts who raised me beat me and starved me," though that is a bid for sympathy, not a fact; there were no such Dickensian hags. On becoming a public figure, Chanel grew so richly inventive about her past, powdering over any discrepancies and shames, that all the film can do is pick and choose, and hope that some of its testimony escapes the fog of myth.



Audrey Tautou as the young Coco Chanel in Anne Fontaine's new movie.

ADRIAN TOMINE

What is certain is that Coco went to reside with Étienne Balsan (Benoît Poelvoorde). He is the best thing in the film, and an accurate, oddly touching demonstration of a type: the pleasure-hunting wastrel, who surprises us, and himself, with the emergence of unfashionable feelings. Coco, having met him in the tavern, rolls up to his country estate, where he breeds Thoroughbreds and misspends the family wealth. ("Rest assured, I haven't read any of them," he says, waving a hand at the yards of leather-bound books.) When I first saw Poelvoorde, sixteen years ago, in "Man Bites Dog," he was whippy and as mean as sin. He has since filled out, the edges have softened, and you can see why Coco might be drawn to such rubicund sloth. Not for a second does she love him, but he is much taken by his new acquisition—more of a curiosity than a mistress—who lounges abed with her hair down, smoking and reading a novel in the mornings. Late in the day, she wins his philistine heart. More important, she borrows his tweed waistcoat, and crops his black ties to make herself a bow. Until this film, I hadn't realized how much Chanel stole from men's clothes ("I'm not used to undressing a boy," one lover admits), not least from the dashing cut of *le style anglais*.

As if to stress the point, she bags herself a real Brit: one of Balsan's chums, by the name of Boy Capel (Alessandro Nivola). Later, during the First World War, he acted as a go-between for Lloyd George and Clemenceau, but to Fontaine he is simply a charm-powered cad, who mildly asks of Balsan, "Mind if I borrow her for a few days?," as if Mlle. Chanel were a sports car, or a filly. Nivola coats the fellow with an unmistakable sheen of self-love; Coco may be mad about her Boy, but he seems mad-der still, though he does lend her the funds to set up a milliner's shop. To those unversed in Chanel, the hats may be news: as befits a woman who was led by her brain, rather than by any lower organ, she began by dressing the head, then worked her way down. Emilienne d'Alençon (Emmanuelle Devos), an actress and full-time voluptuary, tries on one of Coco's plain, unfeathered creations and declares, "I feel totally naked," even though her skirt reaches halfway down her shins.

The problem for Audrey Tautou is that she is doomed to trail clouds of "Amélie" wherever she goes. Those inky round eyes and that pixie mug insure that hers are the features, poor thing, that social anthropologists will eternally reach for when asked to illustrate the term *gamine*. Or *mignonne*. She does her best to capture the sullen grit of the young Coco, and the sour distaste she felt for those off whom she sponged; but it's hard to jut your jaw when you don't have much of a jaw, just a perfectly rounded chin, and the adamantine hardness of Chanel—not just in her bone structure and bearing but in the elimination of all fuss from her couture and all wasteful palaver from her soul—is probably beyond an actress as winsome as Tautou. The ideal would have been Kristin Scott Thomas, twenty years ago. Maybe she could take over, should Fontaine decide to tell the rest of the tale.

As with Tautou, so with the movie. For one thing, the score is far too gentle and antique; Chanel confessed to an affair with Stravinsky, for heaven's sake, and you could argue that her contribution to modernism was as fruitful and far-reaching as that of any other woman, including Gertrude Stein. On the credit side, there are crisp encounters of texture that you long to reach out and caress: Coco sporting a black sequinned jacket during a snowfall, one glitter competing with another, or viewed from behind, trim and tightly buttoned, facing a beach where everyone else is in fluttering silks—she could almost be Chaplin, dropped into a photograph by Lartigue. But too much of the film feels like one of Balsan's house parties: undriven, indulgent, quite at ease. (Nobody seems willing or able to leave them, and even Coco herself tends to wander away and then drift grumpily back; the midsection of the film is a dozier version of Buñuel's "The Exterminating Angel," though Fontaine doesn't grasp, as Buñuel does, how creepy and infernal that sense of immobility must be.) I missed the desperation that goaded the real Coco—not just the sulks that pass like rain showers across Tautou's prettiness but that brisk contempt for existing conditions which led Chanel, like any French revolutionary, to overturn them. Every now and then, it shows through. "Why did you cut your hair?" someone asks near the end. "Because it got in the way," she replies. A hundred and twenty years earlier, she would have done the same thing with heads.

Even Chanel, with her worship of the unrestricting, would have been tested by the outfit that Walt Disney wore on the roof terrace of the Alvear Palace Hotel, in Buenos Aires. It was a bright fall day in 1941, and Walt was on hand to witness a show of local dancing. Naturally, he joined in, first because he and a team of the studio's finest were on a ten-week, government-backed tour of South America, spraying good will and cementing alliances wherever they went, and, second, because he had absolutely no fear of looking goofy, or, indeed, like Goofy. Therefore: fawn sweater with red pane checks, white shoes, and a truly disgraceful, much loved slouch hat that hardly leaves his head.

The story of the tour is recounted in "Walt & El Grupo," a new documentary directed by Theodore Thomas. There is only just enough here to fill a film; in the words of one blistering letter sent home from Brazil, "Everyone's feeling fine and managing to find things to do." No crimes were committed, no diplomatic incidents suppressed, and the films that ensued—"Saludos Amigos" and "The Three Caballeros"—are little more than footnotes in the canon. (Weeks in Argentina produced a pocketful of gaucho gags.) As so often with Disney, though, the evasion of distress and difficulty has a fascination all its own; it is while he was absent that the strike at his Burbank headquarters was resolved (as if he couldn't have borne the thrashing-out of deals), and this may be the first documentary that contains not a single American, living or dead, who is anything but merry of disposition. That cheer carries over to the on-the-spot gusto of *el grupo's* sketchbooks—a more accurate tribute than the final cartoons. "Every time I heard a samba rhythm, I was ready to dance," one artist wrote from Rio. Glancing at the darker world beyond, he added, "Just don't tell my draft board." ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, September 27th. The finalists in the September 14th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 12th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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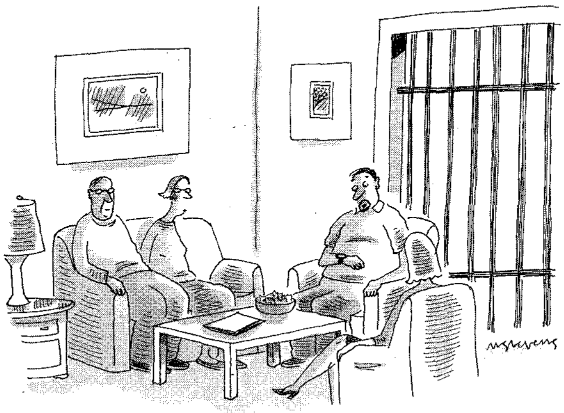
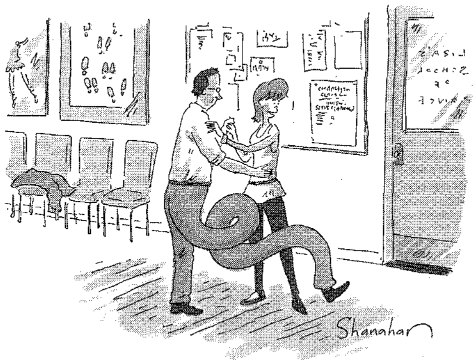


"Geez, it's twenty-five to life already."
Richard Vidan, Lawndale, Calif.



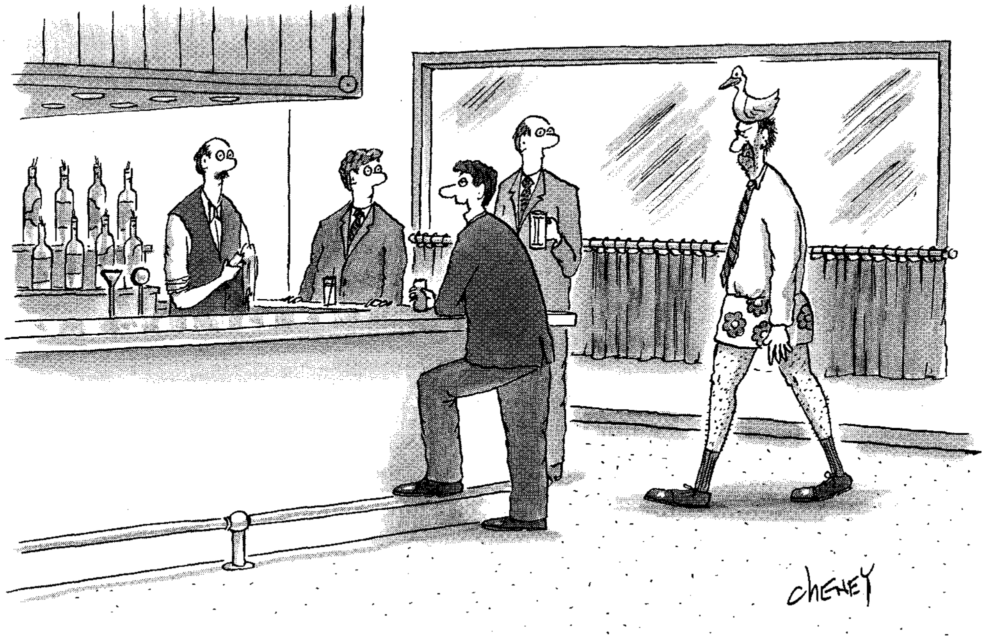
THE FINALISTS

"Another nasty hokeypokey injury!"
Andrew Sneddon, Ottawa, Ont.

"If it stays that way longer than four hours, you should call your doctor."
Dean Kahn, Bellingham, Wash.

"Don't worry, it gets easier."
Gustav Levine, Tucker, Ga.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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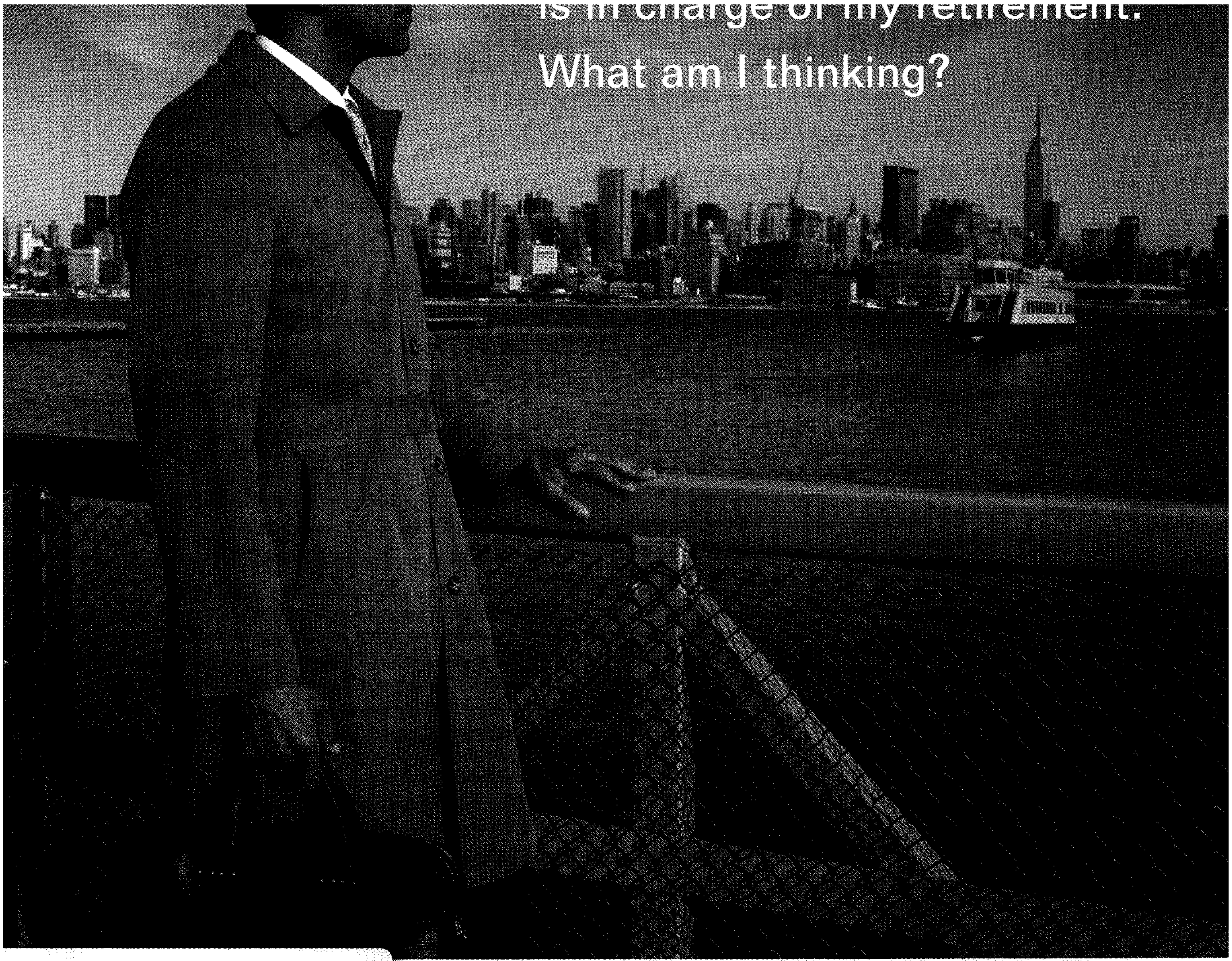
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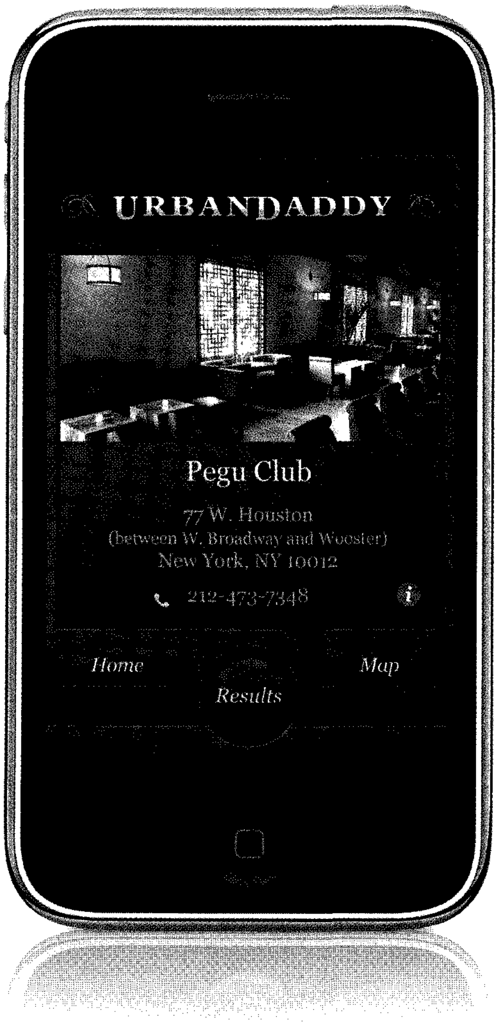

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